Update on the Development of Interoperable Standards and Certification Processes for Health Information Technology

Statement by

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Hearing on
"Accelerating the Adoption of Health Information Technology"

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Introduction

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Co-Chairman, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me today. My name is Mark Leavitt, and I am here in my capacity as Chairman of the Certification Commission for Healthcare Information Technology (CCHIT). I am honored to have the opportunity to address this hearing on "Accelerating the Adoption of Health Information Technology."

Need for Action to Accelerate the Adoption of Interoperable Health IT

The United States may lead the world in its deployment of advanced diagnostic and treatment technology, but our country paradoxically lags many others in the adoption of healthcare *information* technology – computer systems and networks that can manage patient information, enhance care team and patient communication, support evidence-based decision-making, and help prevent medical errors. Dr. David Brailer, the first National Coordinator for Health Information Technology, previously testified before this Subcommittee that widespread health IT adoption could reduce healthcare costs by 7.5% to 30% as well as prevent a substantial fraction of medical errors.[1]

Despite these potential benefits, adoption of health IT has proceeded unevenly. While some of the largest healthcare delivery organizations have fully embraced information technology, adoption in other settings has lagged; for example, fewer than 15% of physicians have electronic health records available in their offices today.[2] Even in cases

where hospitals and offices have installed this technology, their systems are not interoperable, and without this ability to electronically retrieve a patient's record of care from other locations, billions of dollars are wasted annually in unnecessary duplication of tests and procedures.[3]

The Certification Commission for Healthcare Information Technology (CCHIT)

In July 2004, the National Coordinator issued a Framework for Strategic Action to accelerate the adoption of interoperable health IT, and in that report he challenged the private sector to develop certification of health IT products as one of the 'key actions' necessary to both accelerate adoption and ensure interoperability of these systems.[4]

In response to that call for action, the Certification Commission for Healthcare Information Technology (CCHIT) was formed, with the mission of accelerating the adoption of robust, interoperable health IT throughout the US healthcare system, by creating an efficient, credible, sustainable mechanism for the certification of health IT products. Through certification, CCHIT seeks to help accelerate the adoption of health IT in four ways:

1)   By reducing the risk healthcare providers face when investing in health IT

2)   By ensuring interoperability of these systems with emerging networks

3)   By enhancing the availability of financial incentives and/or regulatory relief

4)   By protecting the privacy of personal health information

Funding and staff to launch CCHIT were contributed by three industry associations: the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA), the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS), and the National Alliance for Health Information Technology (Alliance). In June 2005, eight additional organizations further broadened the Commission's funding base. CCHIT then responded to a Request for Proposal from ONC/DHHS for development of compliance criteria and an inspection process to certify electronic health records and networks, and that three-year, $7.5 million contract was awarded to CCHIT in September 2005. Concurrently, contracts were awarded to other entities to harmonize standards, develop National Health Information Network prototypes, and analyze and develop solutions for state-to-state variations in electronic health information privacy policies.

Status Report on the Efforts of CCHIT

CCHIT is pleased to report that it has met all contractual milestones to date. The first phase of the contract required development of standards-compliance criteria and an inspection process for Electronic Health Record (EHR) systems that are used in ambulatory care settings. These criteria, and an inspection process for certifying compliance, have been developed, refined through multiple cycles of public comment, pilot tested, and published. At the present time, testing of the first round of applicants is underway, with the first certification announcement to occur on July 18, 2006. Certification testing will be made available every quarter, and the criteria themselves reviewed and updated annually. Besides listing the criteria required for certification in

the current year, CCHIT also publishes a forward-looking roadmap indicating what additional functionality, interoperability, and security capabilities will be required in future years. In the coming year, the Commission will address certification of components of EHR systems in the hospital, and in the following year, certification will be developed for the emerging networks that interconnect these systems.

Although CCHIT operates in the private sector, the organization strives to meet the stringent requirements for openness and transparency that apply to governmental activities, and its work represents a broad consensus among both private and public stakeholders. In the private sector, this includes physicians, hospitals, other care providers such as safety net facilities, health IT vendors, payers and purchasers of healthcare, quality improvement organizations, standards development organizations; informatics experts, consumer organizations; and others. From the public sector, CCHIT has benefited from participation by representatives of Federal agencies including HHS/ONC, CMS, VA, and CDC. In addition, NIST has an active role in providing expert advice to CCHIT on the development and execution of its test processes. CCHIT also works collaboratively with the other HHS health IT contractors.

Summary

CCHIT's goal is to help accelerate the adoption of robust, interoperable health IT by certifying the standards-compliance of health IT products. The Commission has engaged diverse stakeholders in its efforts while achieving the milestones set forth in its contract

with HHS, and the first announcement of certified products will take place in less than one month. CCHIT is proud to play a role as part of the federal government's leadership strategy in health IT.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Commission, thank you for your time. I would be pleased to answer any questions you have.

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[1] Brailer DJ, Testimony before the United States Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation Subcommittee on Technology, Innovation, and Competitiveness, June 30, 2005

[2] Gans D, Kralewski J, Hammons T, Dowd B, "Medical Groups' Adoption of Electronic Health Records and Information Systems," *Health Affairs* 24:5, 1323-1333, Sept 2005.

[3] Walker J, Pan E, Johnston D, Adler-Milstein J, Bates DW, Middleton B, "The Value Of Health Care Information Exchange and Interoperability," *Health Affairs* web exclusive W5-10, Jan 2005.

[4] Thompson TG, Brailer DJ, "The Decade of Health Information Technology: Delivering Consumer-centric and Information-rich Health Care -- A Framework for Strategic Action, July 2004 (www.hhs.gov/healthit/documents/hitframework.pdf)