

Special Audio Report Transcript

Headline: Health IT Community Reacts to Final Rule on Temporary E-Health Record Certification

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Text:

I'm Pat McConahay with reaction to a final rule on the temporary electronic health record certification program. This is a Special Report for iHealthBeat, a daily news service from the California HealthCare Foundation.

Members of the health IT community still have plenty of questions after a final rule on temporary certification was released. On June 18, the Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT released a final rule creating a way that EHR products will be certified under the "meaningful use" incentive plan.

One common concern among some groups is that in its final rule, ONC did not designate the Certification Commission for Health IT, an existing EHR certification group, as a temporary certification body. Therefore, CCHIT must apply along with other interested organizations. Robert Tennant, senior policy adviser for the Medical Group Management Association, said CCHIT has done a good job so far and should continue at least through the first stage of the meaningful use program.

(Tennant): "I think it would have solved a lot of problems in the sense that right now there's going to be what I call a funnel approach. You've got several groups already applying to be certified bodies and yet we haven't even got the rules out yet for what they will be certifying."

Tennant said assuming those rules come out soon, you have a short timeframe in which vendors must bring their products forward to be certified and then for products to be ruled out.

CCHIT's chair Karen Bell, says her organization will apply for the new program. While CCHIT asked to be "grandfathered" in as a certifier, the fact that it wasn't

didn't come as a shock to Bell, who adds that she expected that ONC would want a number of certifying entities.

(Bell) "And I don't think it's a surprise that the federal government insists on a level playing field for anyone who's going to be a temporary or permanent certifying body to go through the same process, so this was entirely anticipated and not a surprise to us."

Last year the Health IT Policy Committee's certification and adoption work group recommended that multiple organizations be allowed to provide HHS certification for EHR systems. The work group stressed the need to avoid the appearance of any bias or conflict of interest.

In March, officials of the Austin-based Drummond Group said it intended to apply to be a certification body, but co-owner Beth Drummond did not want to comment for this report.

Meanwhile, MGMA's Tennant says he thinks medical practices could run into some problems with multiple certification groups.

(Tennant) "One is if somebody other than CCHIT offers certification it's clearly going to confuse the marketplace. Practices are now very used to the CCHIT seal. That's what they look for. They include that in RFPs and other types of contracts with vendors and so it throws another bit of confusion into the process, which is already very much a challenge for practices."

David Muntz, who's on the board of the College of Healthcare Information Management Executives, says he's generally pleased with the rule so far, but like MGMA, his organization recommended that ONC allow CCHIT's ongoing certification efforts. Still, Muntz says he understands why the federal agency did not.

(Muntz) "We would have preferred it would have happened because it would have meant a lot less work for some people who'd already gotten their certifications. But the rules are pretty easy to understand. They want to make sure that everybody's going to be working on a particular set of standards and they've established what those are and they've chosen the rules by which the measurements will be judged."

Crystal Kallem of the American Health Information Management Association says AHIMA is pleased with how CCHIT has certified products up to now. And even though ONC didn't accept it as a bridge to permanent certification, she's confident it

will become an official EHR certifying body based on its outstanding track record. Kallem says part of the challenge her industry has faced so far relates to scope.

(Kallem) "So now that the concept of certification has caught on there is a lot more work that can be done in the industry to advance certification and adoption of the EHR systems."

For CHIME's Muntz, the biggest issues in the future are privacy and security.

(Muntz) "As long as things keep changing, and the date keeps moving closer, we get nervous, or I get nervous. So that's still a concern until all of the rules and regs are all out. We still have uncertainty."

In the final rule ONC announced it will sunset the temporary program on December 31, 2011, and expects to publish a final rule on the permanent program in the fall.

This has been a special report for iHealthBeat, a daily news service from the California HealthCare Foundation. If you have feedback or other issues you'd like to have addressed, please email us at ihb@chcf.org. I'm Pat McConahay. Thanks for listening.