

## Special Audio Report Transcript

Headline: Health Care Community Still Examining Final Rule on 'Meaningful Use,' Looking Ahead

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### Text:

Health IT stakeholders continue to pore over the final rule on the "meaningful use" of electronic health records. This is a special report for *iHealthBeat*, a daily news service of the California HealthCare Foundation. I'm Mina Kim.

The final rule that federal officials released in July defines how health care providers can demonstrate meaningful use of electronic health records to qualify for Medicare and Medicaid incentive payments under the 2009 economic stimulus package. The American Hospital Association says that although the rule has been out for several weeks, it's so complex that AHA is still wrestling with the full scope of changes from the proposed rule to the final rule. Chantal Worzala is AHA's director of policy.

***(Worzala): "One of the things that the hospital community is looking at carefully is the extent to which the final rule includes the emergency department as well as the inpatient departments."***

Federal officials released the final rule after fielding more than 2,000 public comments on its earlier proposal. Worzala says the final rule made some significant improvements like introducing more flexibility into meaningful use objectives, but it also fell short in other ways. It failed to address the specific needs of smaller, rural hospitals, she said, and created hurdles by excluding individual hospitals within multi-campus settings from incentive payments. Worzala says AHA supports bills introduced in both the House and Senate addressing this. But the biggest concern is the expected timeframe for EHR adoption, especially amid other priorities.

***(Worzala): "This is happening at the same time as a move to ICD-10 which puts tremendous burden on hospital IT departments. Because of course they do all sort of things besides implementing EHRs."***

The timeline is also a concern for family physicians, says practitioner Jason Mitchell. He's assistant director in the Center for Health IT at the American Academy of Family Physicians.

***(Mitchell): "It's still not completely clear to our membership what's required and part of that is based on the issue that step one is to***

***have a certified EHR technology, and currently there is no certified EHR technology. So that's a real stumbling block for convincing physicians what comes next and how they approach this process."***

Mitchell says another looming question among physicians is the cost of upgrading or replacing current systems.

***(Mitchell): "Some organizations for certain components of meaningful use to be able to upgrade the systems that are already in place, it may be on the order of 15 to 20 thousand dollars or more, and that's a lot for a practice to take on."***

Mitchell says physicians are pleased with some aspects of the final rule including its reduction in requirements and the ability to choose from a menu of compliance options. But there's still concern over reporting requirements.

***(Mitchell): "We've had some other incentive programs from CMS, particularly the e-prescribing program and then the PQRI, Physicians Quality Reporting Initiative, and a number of our members have participated in those plans and because of technical issues they have not received payment, because of the complexity of the reporting structures they have been unable to comply."***

Among those responding more positively to the new rules are consumer groups and health IT vendors. Glen Tullman, CEO of EHR software giant Allscripts, praised the meaningful use criteria as giving providers the clarity, resources and flexibility to adopt EHR while also holding providers accountable to patients. Tullman says his company helped inform the development of meaningful use and pushed to make the criteria more aggressive.

***(Tullman): "It's a very fine line between wanting to improve health care and wanting to make it easy for people to meet the standards and our view generally is that no one has to take the incentives that are being offered. So from that perspective, my view is that the government ought to drive a hard bargain."***

In addition to defining how health care providers can demonstrate meaningful use, federal officials also released the final rule on the standards and certification requirements for EHR technology. Tullman says his company will meet or exceed the certification criteria and is making efforts to help hospitals and physicians take advantage of incentive payments.

***(Tullman): "We believe we're at the beginning of the single fastest transformation of an industry in the history of the United States. Never before has the government targeted 30 billion dollars to fundamentally change an industry so quickly."***

The American Academy of Family Physicians' Jason Mitchell says he's looking ahead, too.

***(Mitchell): "Meaningful use has been introduced as a process and this is the initial step on the escalator and then we'll move up from there. And were all expecting 2013 and 2015 to bring significant changes to the rules."***

Addressing the House Ways and Means Committee following the release of the meaningful use rule, National Coordinator for Health IT David Blumenthal reminded the panel that the final rule is the first of three sets of rules and applies to incentives granted before 2013. Later regulations, he said, will have more stringent requirements.

This has been a special report for *iHealthBeat*, a daily news service of the California HealthCare Foundation. If you have feedback or other issues you'd like to have addressed please email us at [iHB@chcf.org](mailto:iHB@chcf.org). I'm Mina Kim, thanks for listening.