



Ideas for Change: Beginning the Discussion March 20, 2008

BEST INFORMATION

Good information is the gateway to good care. Significant effort is already underway in the public and private sector to speed the adoption and use of health information technology (IT). However, more can and should be done to accelerate IT – the critical link in transforming health and health care in America. And more can and should be done to encourage a system-centered, community approach to IT adoption and use.

1. Fundamentally reform the payment model to encourage specific IT adoption by health care professionals and hospitals.

With specific assistance in place (described below), select a date certain by which minimum IT capabilities must be in place in care delivery settings.

- Encourage basic IT capabilities for providers with key targets and milestones for adoption set by the government.
- Link provider payments to adoption of these basic IT requirements.
- Make incentive payments for use of more sophisticated, effective IT interventions such as bar coding, digital imaging, and computerized provider order entry.
- Provide funding for health care professional and other staff training in the use of health IT.

2. Drive the secure exchange of clinical information among and across different providers of care.

A greater exchange of clinical information among a patient's various providers can improve care coordination, safety, and the quality of care that patients receive. Health care information exchange is also important to help consumers make informed decisions about the providers and services they choose. Incentives and direct funding for those serving the nation's most vulnerable populations and for those providers most in need will help launch greater IT adoption.

- Use payment incentives to reward greater sharing of information among health care professionals, hospitals, pharmacies, and others.
- Direct federal financing to helping health care professionals, hospitals, pharmacies, community health centers, and other providers acquire, implement, maintain, and upgrade health IT systems.

- Give priority to health care professionals, hospitals, pharmacies, community health centers, and others with the least financial means and who are serving the most vulnerable populations.

3. *Speed the creation of electronic health records and personal health records by selecting and using “interoperable” health standards.*

Lack of a consistent set of “rules” for how to share health care information has slowed the sharing and use of IT in health care.

- Select information technology standards to allow “interoperability” – easy information exchange among health care providers when authorized. These standards could be selected through a voluntary approach involving key stakeholders with key targets and milestones of adoption set by the government.
- Standard selection should be prioritized to begin with those that make handoffs in care delivery safer.
- Encourage the voluntary adoption of the selected standards by all IT manufacturers with key targets and milestones for adoption set by the government.
- Government health care programs should lead and drive IT standard selection and use.
- To promote standardization and interoperability, develop a basic and uniform set of information that all medical records must contain.

4. *Encourage private sector creation and use of unique, confidential health information identifiers to accurately and securely link patients to their health records.*

A unique patient identifier allows information about a patient’s care to be shared quickly and accurately, when authorized, among providers in a secure and appropriate way. This increases accuracy, patient safety, and continuity of care and reduces the need for repeat tests and procedures.

- Provide incentives for the private sector to create and use unique health information identifiers to accurately link every patient to his or her health record.
- Encourage the design of a system to manage the unique assignment of health information identifiers.
- Provide incentives for patients to “opt in” to the use of a unique identifier.
- Ensure that patients and their providers control what information on the health record can be seen and by whom.

5. *Provide incentives for health care suppliers and insurers to enable the use of IT.*

Speeding up IT adoption will require action from all. At the front end of this care delivery process, health care suppliers and insurers must enable the use of IT, coordinating their efforts with doctors, hospitals, and others.

- Encourage pharmaceutical and device companies to adopt IT enablers such as unique medication and device identification at the unit dose level with key targets and milestones for adoption set by the government.
- Encourage insurers to adopt and use a single, uniform bill using similar incentives.

- Encourage technology manufacturers to meet standards for inter-technology compatibility using similar incentives.

6. *Conduct research and development of the market requirements and business models needed to create the next generation systems and technologies.*

While making strides in IT development and adoption, the real power of IT to support clinicians' decision making and improve safety and quality of care have yet to be fully tapped.

- Fund the research and development necessary to guide the private sector development of IT to take advantage of all of its capabilities to enhance care delivery.

7. *Allow providers and community collaboratives to share information exchange capabilities.*

In order to speed the adoption of health IT and the sharing of clinical information, certain key barriers must be removed.

- Change Stark anti-kickback laws and IRS practices to allow providers and community collaboratives to share knowledge, hardware, software, or training with others in the community.
- Develop and support regional models of community information sharing organizations that will aid data exchange and successfully demonstrate effective models and improvement.

8. *Establish national models for data use that will facilitate community health improvement.*

Build sets of roadmaps for certain types of data that could be shared, analyzed, and acted upon in order to identify opportunities and track progress in community health.

- Prioritize data sets based on feasibility and demonstrated utility.
- Distribute information about barriers, solutions, and best practices.
- Link critical care data sets with public health and social services data as appropriate.
- Model incentives tied to community health.

9. *Renovate the education of health care professionals (see “Most Efficient Affordable Care”).*