



Final Meaningful Use Rules: A Giant Leap Towards Better Care Management

The final meaningful use regulations may be the first domino to bring about monumental change and transformation to the U.S. healthcare system.

By Eric Demers, senior vice president of health and life science, MEDecision

The widespread adoption of electronic health records (EHRs) throughout the healthcare system received another boost in recent weeks when the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) announced its final criteria for the meaningful use of EHRs within the incentive program established by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. After releasing preliminary meaningful use regulations back in January, the agency spent the past several months collecting the thoughts and opinions of anyone and everyone in healthcare who took the time to submit one. CMS has said these factored into the finished product quite heavily, so score one for transparency.

The final meaningful use regulations won't diminish the impact that the EHR incentive program will have on health plans. The program's effect on healthcare reform will remain about the same. In many respects the final regs offer more flexibility than those proposed in January, which should increase EHR adoption within the plan's first few years. Entities will be less likely to wait until the eve of EHR implementation deadlines.

The bottom line is that greater usage of EHRs will get electronic medical data flowing throughout the system. We'll see more integration and sharing of information among payers, providers and even patients, which is a major step in the path to reform. In fact, one might very reasonably argue that sharing clinical data among the system's various stakeholders in this manner is one of the primary underpinnings of the whole reform philosophy. Or, at least, that a lot of the major tenets of reform are predicated upon it.

For us at MEDecision, adoption of the final meaningful use regs — and the subsequent proliferation of EHRs that it will enable — is certainly an exciting and rather long-awaited development. Anyone who has followed our company over the past two-plus decades knows that we believe strongly in the potential of EHRs and healthcare IT to bring real, sustainable change to the healthcare system. Our philosophy has

always been that through technology and working collaboratively we can bring a greater breadth and depth of actionable clinical information to those who need it, whenever and wherever they need it and in whatever format best suits them. Doing so enables faster and more accurate decisions which can have a major impact on operational efficiencies and cost containment. Most importantly, however, it has always been our position that this approach is our most promising means of improving care, which is what it's all about in the first place. It's very energizing for us to see healthcare finally heading in the same direction we've been headed since 1988.

The coming months and years may turn out to be among the most pivotal the system has ever seen, and we're gearing up to play a significant role in the transformation. Even those who don't have as big a stake in the game as we do should find this to be a fascinating time in the evolution of the healthcare system and, perhaps, in the history of our country. One of the largest, most complex and most important institutions in our society is about to experience unprecedented change and transformation. No matter where you come down on the topic of healthcare reform, you have to admit it will be nothing if not monumental. In its own way, CMS's finalization of meaningful use regulations may ultimately wind up being the first domino to have fallen when it's all said and done.

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