

December 11, 2013

Senator John Thune
511 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Thune:

We are writing to express our support for your amendment requiring the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to adopt standards ensuring electronic health record systems are interoperable across vendor platforms by 2017. Interoperability is important so every health care provider can access longitudinal data on patients they treat to make evidence-based decisions, coordinate care and improve health outcomes. This is a key goal articulated by the Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT, which we support.

We believe this requirement is important for three reasons:

1. Patients will benefit from improvements in outcomes, quality and efficiencies that interoperability can deliver;
2. Providers will be maximally effective in care coordination programs; and
3. Congress and taxpayers will have certainty HITECH is working as intended.

Patients. Numerous peer-reviewed studies have documented reduced hospitalizations, mortality, morbidity, improved outcomes, enhanced quality of services and efficiency gains associated with health information technology. Most in the IT community have concluded these gains are only optimized with interoperable systems. In fact, the RAND Corporation released a study this year that estimates \$81 billion in potential annual savings, but only if Electronic Health Records (EHRs) are interoperable. Absent interoperability, it is unlikely patients will receive the clinical and cost saving potential of technology.

Providers. Likewise, providers need interoperable systems to treat patients well. While accountable care arrangements and clinical integration can take many different forms, at their most basic level they will require evidence based processes, clinical benchmarks and the creation of a common understanding of the patient, their diseases, and the care management strategies being employed by a team of physicians across the spectrum of care.

If the Committee desires providers to be maximally effective in the Value Based Payment (VPM) and Advanced Payment Models (APMs) envisioned in the SGR draft proposal, it will require a new commitment to interoperable health systems. Importantly, your amendment aligns interoperability with the revised date of Stage 3 of the Meaningful Use program and the first date of the VBP and APM programs. This alignment will help reduce regulatory burdens and ease transition into the new payment regimes.

Congress and Taxpayers. We support your amendment because Congress has an opportunity to add a date certain for an as-yet unrealized core provision of the HITECH law; namely: electronic health record systems are interoperable across vendor platforms so that every health care provider has access to longitudinal data on patients they treat to make evidence-based decisions, coordinate care and improve health outcomes.

If your amendment is adopted, we believe Congress will have taken a major step to improving the HITECH law, while also improving outcomes and quality, lowering health costs, improving patient safety and, quite literally, saving lives. We can think of little else more important and strongly encourage adoption of your amendment.

Sincerely,

Academy of Managed Care Pharmacy
Aetna
American Association of Diabetes Educators
American Nurses Association
Intel
Latinos in Information Sciences and Technology
Association
National Association of Manufacturers
National Council for Behavioral Health

National Latino Alliance on Health Information
Technology
National Patient Advocate Foundation (NPAF)
Newborn Coalition
Newborn Foundation
Oracle
RetireSafe
Verizon