Coalition Promises Free, Easy ePrescribing Access

BY JOEL B. FINKELSTEIN Contributing Writer

WASHINGTON — Doctors who have yet to get on the health information technology bandwagon no longer have any excuses, according to members of the National ePrescribing Patient Safety Initiative, a coalition of businesses, providers, and industry leaders. The initiative said NEPSI is offering physicians offices access to a secure, easy-to-use system that is compatible with the software in 99% of the nation’s pharmacies, so they can simply and quickly submit an electronic prescription that can be processed by the physician and the patient’s pharmacy in under 40 minutes, Dr. Korbey said.

“Patients will have the technology to make this problem go away, less than one in five of my colleagues are using electronic prescribing,” said Dr. Dickey, former president of the American Medical Association.

No More Excuses

Dr. Dickey said time and money have been major barriers for the adoption of electronic prescribing, despite the fact that widespread use of electronic prescribing could save the U.S. health care system as much as $27 billion, as estimated by the Center for Information Technology Leadership.

“Part of the problem is that people who are being asked to take the time and to spend the money to put this in their offices — the physicians — aren’t necessarily the ones who get the financial benefit,” she said.

That’s why the coalition has come together to offer physicians an option that is not only free, but takes 15-40 minutes to learn, said Dr. Dickey.

“It is a truly easy system,” said Dr. Azar Korbey, a family physician in Salem, N.H., who has been testing the software for the past year. Even someone who is not computer savvy should be able to learn the system in under 40 minutes, Dr. Korbey guessed.

NEPSI’s efforts may be just the kick-start some physicians need, said Dr. Wilson Pace, director of the American Academy of Family Physicians’ National Research Network and a member of the IOM committee that produced last year’s report on medication errors.

“This appears to be a relatively safe way to try out something and get started for somebody who is not quite clear where they want to go,” Dr. Pace said in an interview.

Patient Safety Is the Goal

To that end, the initiative is being wholly funded by the coalition of private stakeholders at an estimated cost of $100 million for the first 5 years. That is in contrast to other free electronic prescribing software that requires physicians to market personal health records or other products to patients.

The companies that are supporting and paying for NEPSI see this as an investment in the future, said Glen Tullman, chief executive officer of Allscripts Inc., which is leading the effort.

“Down the road, we’re very hopeful that this encourages adoption of full electronic health records, and Allscripts is a leading provider of those health records,” he said at the briefing.

Interoperable Standards Are First Step to Retiring Clipboards

BY JOEL B. FINKELSTEIN Contributing Writer

WASHINGTON — Eliminating “the stupid clipboard” may be the simplest, most straightforward benefit that would come from electronic interoperability standards designed to allow physicians’ offices to communicate with hospitals, labs, insurers, and each other, according to Dr. John Halama, chairman of the Health Information Technology Standards Panel.

HITSP delivered its first set of harmonization standards to the federal office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology late last year. The panel was convened just over a year ago by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) under a Health and Human Services department contract to assist in the development of a Nationwide Health Information Network (NHIN).

The panel is developing a series of interoperability specifications that offer a development of a Nationwide Health Information Services Department contract to assist in the Standards Panel.

The initiative called — “offering physicians’ offices access to a secure, easy-to-use system that is compatible with the software in 99% of the nation’s pharmacies, coalition members said at a press briefing to announce the launch of the initiative.”

NEPSI also includes regional organizations, universities hospitals, and medical centers, which will act as a support network for physicians who choose to use the online tool.

“According to the Institute of Medicine, 1.5 million Americans are injured and more than 7,000 die from medication errors every year. As a practicing physician, I find that unacceptable,” said Dr. Nancy Dickey, a family physician and president of the Health Science Center at Texas A&M University in College Station.

In a report released last year, the IOM identified electronic prescribing as the single most significant step physicians can take to reduce drug-related medical errors. That report noted that many of the errors are caused by illegible handwriting, unclear abbreviations, and miscalculated doses.

“More than 3 billion prescriptions are written every year, and even though we have the technology to make this problem virtually go away, less than one in five of the physicians have the technology to make this problem virtually go away, less than one in five of my colleagues are using electronic prescribing,” said Dr. Dickey, former president of the American Medical Association.

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Dr. Dickey said time and money have been major barriers for the adoption of electronic prescribing, despite the fact that widespread use of electronic prescribing could save the U.S. health care system as much as $27 billion, as estimated by the Center for Information Technology Leadership.

“For the medical community, the government has the potential to put a real dent in the problem, said Dr. Pace.

“For the primary care system in England it is virtually all electronic. The driving force behind that movement was stand-alone prescription systems,” he said.

It is not clear how physicians in this country will feel about adopting an electronic prescribing system that is not integrated with electronic medical records, but “there’s no question it’s a step up from paper,” said Dr. Pace.

Who’s on Board

The eRx Express?

Members of the National ePrescribing Patient Safety Initiative include:

- Allscripts Inc.
- Dell Inc.
- Cisco Systems
- Fujitsu Computers of America
- Microsoft Corp.
- Sprint Nextel
- Wolters Kluwer Health
- Aetna
- WellPoint
- SureScripts
- Google
- Twelve regional health care organizations

“Patients are concerned that the government has the potential to put a real dent in the problem, said Dr. Pace.

“We think this is a truly easy system,” said Dr. Azar Korbey, a family physician in Salem, N.H., who has been testing the software for the past year. Even someone who is not computer savvy should be able to learn the system in under 40 minutes, Dr. Korbey guessed.

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