Group to Introduce Certification of EHR Products

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BOston — A coalition of private sector informatics groups plans to launch a process for certifying electronic health record products late this year. Certification will bring some predictability into the market for physicians, vendors, and payers, Mark Leavitt, M.D., who is chair of the Certification Commission for Healthcare Information Technology, said at a congress sponsored by the American Medical Informatics Association.

The commission’s initial scope is to certify electronic health record (EHR) products for physician offices and other ambulatory settings. They plan to begin beta testing products as part of a pilot project in September. By the end of the year, the commission is slated to publish certification requirements and to outline a roadmap for vendors for requirements for the next 1-2 years, Dr. Leavitt said.

The roadmap is a key part of the commission’s work because the cycle for getting new features, interfaces, and interoperability functions into a product can be 6-18 months or more. “We need to signal to the industry as to where we are going next, so it has time to respond,” he said.

The certification commission was founded last year by the American Health Information Management Association, the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS), and the National Alliance for Health Information Technology. The three groups have provided seed funding and have loaned staff members to the effort. As the process moves forward, the commission will charge fees to the vendors to cover the cost of testing the products. They also plan to seek sustaining grants from other organizations to maintain their operations, said Dr. Leavitt, who is also the medical director at HIMSS.

Under the voluntary certification process, products will either be certified or not certified. “We are not trying to create a competitive rating system,” Dr. Leavitt said. The idea is that the commission will be setting a baseline standard, leaving space for competition and innovation above that standard.

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