

*New Demonstration Project for EHRs
by Kerry Weems, Acting Administrator, CMS*

A new national Medicare demonstration program is aiming to show health care professionals the on-the-ground advantages of connecting to the information age.

Medicare is looking for 12 communities across the country that can bring together a broad cross-section of community leadership, leverage resources, and recruit small and medium-sized primary care physician practices willing to provide the evidence that electronic health records (EHR) can improve the quality of patient care.

As many as 1,200 physician practices nationwide could be eligible for incentive payments of up to \$58,000 per physician – up to \$290,000 per practice – over the five-year life of the demonstration. Incentives would be based on a practice's level of EHR use, and for reporting and performance on 26 clinical quality measures.

But the rewards of joining are much more than financial. An entire community can benefit from the use of EHRs, which can help avoid drug interactions, redundant lab and diagnostic tests – meaning fewer medical errors and potentially lower costs. Medicare plans to announce the winning communities in June, 2008.

There is no question that interoperable EHRs will be a key part of the healthcare landscape in the future. Medicare's objective, with this demonstration, is to launch the construction of an interconnected electronic information system quickly and seamlessly. The challenge before us is not whether to move forward to improve health care quality through the secure exchange of medical information, but how to accomplish this most effectively.

To learn more about the new EHR demonstration project, visit: http://www.cms.hhs.gov/DemoProjectsEvalRpts/downloads/2008_Electronic_Health_Records_Demonstration.pdf. Email EHR_Demo@cms.hhs.gov or EHR_Demo_communityselections@cms.hhs.gov for more information about community selection.

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