

HHS official pushes for electronic recordkeeping

BY ANDI ATWATER
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The U.S. government is encouraging physician practices in Wichita to team with other Kansas communities to adopt electronic health records in exchange for higher Medicare payments.

Government officials would like to see Kansas submit an application next month to win a spot in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' five-year Medicare demonstration project.

The project provides incentive payments — as much as \$58,000 per physician — for doctors who use certified electronic health records to improve patient care.

HHS Deputy Secretary Tevi Troy promoted the project to about 30 stakeholders — including physicians, insurers and employers — Thursday in Wichita and encouraged community leaders to support one another in getting the area's smallest physician practices on board.

"We envision a world where doctors, hospitals, labs and pharmacies are all connected electronically," he said. "This demonstration pro-

ject will help minimize errors, reduce costs and save lives."

The project is a major step toward meeting President Bush's goal of having a national interoperable health record by 2014, Troy said.

The idea is to get "more value injected into the system," he said. He described four cornerstones to get there: transparency, access to quality, access to price information, and financial incentives for "putting it all together," he said.

HHS will choose 12 demonstration sites nationally, each with 200 physician groups of five or fewer doctors.

Wichita doesn't have enough small-physician groups to qualify on its own and will team with CareEntrust, an employer-driven nonprofit group in Kansas City that



Troy



Roscell

is submitting an application, said Jon Roscell, executive director of the Medical Society of Sedgwick County, which will facilitate Wichita's participation.

CareEntrust provides a health information-sharing network aimed at enhancing care and controlling costs, the group's Web site says.

At the very least, "this whole initiative, as well as some other activities we're doing, really allows us to come together as a community to find out where we are in terms of electronic health records," Roscell said.

"And to see how that can help improve patient care as well as impact the cost of care — and how can we share that information across multiple providers."

Under the demonstration project, physicians would have to pay the upfront costs of installing an electronic health records system, which can start at \$20,000.

Total incentive payments under the demonstration project, however, could add up to \$290,000 in a five-doctor practice.

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