

Certified Meaningful

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By Kerry F. Costa, RHIA

This month providers will begin seeing the first EHR products approved for use in the "meaningful use" incentive program. Another piece of the ARRA puzzle is falling into place.

In March 2010 the Office of the National Coordinator (ONC) proposed two programs to test and approve EHR products for use in the "meaningful use" incentive program—one temporary, one permanent. Certification is intended to ensure that products function as expected and meet the requirements of the meaningful use program. Program participants must use approved products.

ONC proposed a temporary program to fast-track the certification process while a permanent program underwent development. The temporary program became effective with the publication of a final rule on June 24. On July 1, ONC began accepting applications from organizations interested in becoming ONC-approved testing and certifying bodies, or ONC-ATCBs.

The number of applicants is not limited, and organizations may apply at any time while the temporary certification program is in place. ONC intends to review applications and make determinations within 30 days of receipt.

The Certification Commission for Health Information Technology was the first organization to announce its intention to apply, and its existing certification process and early preparation for the meaningful use program promised a fairly quick approval. In the days following the final rule's publication, ONC received 14 requests for applications, director of ONC's certification division Carol Bean told a meeting of the Health Information Technology Standards Committee.

ONC-ATCBs are permitted to begin testing and certifying EHR technology based on their authorization once received. It is anticipated that an ONC-ATCB will begin testing within weeks of being approved.

ONC expects that approximately 93 complete EHRs and 50 EHR modules will be tested and certified under the program, a number it used to estimate the cost of the program and which it first proposed in the March interim final rule.

ONC requires that ATCBs have the capacity to test and certify complete EHRs and EHR modules at the ATCB's facility, off-site, or remotely (i.e., the site where the complete EHR or EHR module has been developed, the site where the EHR or module resides, remotely via secure electronic transmissions and automated Web-based tools, or at a location other than the ONC-ATCB's facility).

Currently EHR products will be tested against the criteria for stage 1 of meaningful use, which ONC published as an interim final rule in January. The final rule on the criteria was published in July in tandem with the final rule on meaningful use. It is expected there will be additional or modified criteria related to the later stages of meaningful use as the requirements for those stages are finalized in the coming years.

The temporary certification program is targeted to sunset January 1, 2012, when it will be replaced by the permanent program. A final rule on the permanent certification program is expected this fall.

In support of the certification program, the National Institute of Standards and Technology is developing the conformance test methods (i.e., test procedures, test data, and test tools). Information is available at http://xw2k.nist.gov/healthcare/use_testing.

References

Department of Health and Human Services. "Certification Programs." Available online at <http://healthit.hhs.gov> (see "Regulations & Guidance").

Department of Health and Human Services. "Establishment of the Temporary Certification Program for Health Information Technology; Final Rule." 45 CFR Part 170. Available online at <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2010/pdf/2010-14999.pdf>.

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