

Health IT Certification Developments: CCHIT's Current Work and How to Get Involved

Save to myBoK

by **Cassi Birnbaum**, RHIA, CPHQ; **Terri Hal l**, MHA, BS, RHIT, CPC; **Helayne Sweet**, MS; and **Lou Ann Wiedemann**, MS, RHIA, CPEHR

For the last five years the Certification Commission for Healthcare Information Technology (CCHIT) has been working to promote the adoption of health IT by certifying electronic health record (EHR) products against common, baseline criteria.

The private, nonprofit certification body continues to advance and expand certification criteria and is extending its work beyond EHR products to health information networks. CCHIT's work provides HIM professionals volunteer opportunities to help shape the standards that are defining EHR products and health data exchange.

What to Look for in 2009–2010

The process of gradually building interoperability into EHR products will move to a higher level of technical capability in 2009 with the introduction of standards for sharing electronic documents across healthcare enterprises.

In 2008 CCHIT began to require that certain types of data in EHRs become structured and standardized so they can be more easily accessed for various reporting activities and readily exchangeable among different information systems. In 2009 certified EHRs for ambulatory settings must be able to use nationally recognized standards for sharing a “starter set” of information, and they must use structured terminologies when generating and sending information on registration, medication, and immunization.

In January CCHIT also began the second phase of a modular approach to certification of health information exchanges (HIEs). This phase will test the network's ability to receive and send a lab result. The first certification phase began in October 2008, testing criteria on HIE security. Applications are still being accepted.

To be certified, an HIE must successfully complete the security test and one transaction test, though it can seek the recognition of being certified in more than one transaction. In April testing will begin on two additional transactions: a lab report document and a patient summary.

In January CCHIT completed the second of three requests for public comment on its criteria for PHR certification, which in the first year focused on establishing a foundation of security and privacy protection. Part of that initiative involves incorporating principles from the Office of the National Coordinator's “Nationwide Privacy and Security Framework for Electronic Exchange of Individually Identifiable Health Information” into its criteria. CCHIT also is drawing from experience in establishing security and privacy criteria in its EHR programs, a strong commitment at the outset of EHR certification that continues in the expansion into PHRs. The process of certifying PHRs is expected to begin in the summer.

In addition, CCHIT may establish collaborative teams in subject areas that cut across work group domains. Examples of these cross-cutting areas include quality measurement and reporting, registry reporting, decision support, and standardized vocabularies.

CCHIT has also issued a call to expand its health IT certification programs. The road map includes development of several new certification programs for launch in 2010. Two areas named in previous years, behavioral health and long-term care, will be developed as planned. Four new program areas are proposed, all of which are optional add-on certifications for ambulatory EHRs: clinical research, dermatology, advanced interoperability, and advanced quality.

The road map identifies additional areas for future consideration, even though programs may not be ready for launch in 2010. These include eye care, oncology, obstetrics and gynecology, advanced security, and advanced clinical decision support. At

press time, that proposed road map was available for public comment and final decisions about the expansion areas were scheduled for late February.

New Work with Standards Harmonization

CCHIT works cooperatively with several standards development organizations. As existing and emerging standards are developed, recognized, and adopted, CCHIT develops criteria and an inspection process that measures product compliance against standards and provides a seal of certification.

CCHIT works closely with the Healthcare Information Technology Standards Panel (HITSP) through joint work group meetings in which members share strategies and plans to integrate HITSP constructs into CCHIT's development road map based on cross-mapping efforts between the two organizations.

The CCHIT Interoperability Work Group has mapped HITSP constructs recognized by the secretary of Health and Human Services, including the patient demographics query to the CCHIT inpatient, ambulatory, and emergency department interoperability requirements. Other HITSP constructs include consent documentation and laboratory report document components. These constructs support the HITSP Consumer Empowerment and Access to Clinical Information via Networks Interoperability Specification, which defines specific standards needed to enable the exchange of data between patients and their caregivers. (HITSP constructs are available at www.hitsp.org.)

Interoperability requirements may vary based upon the domain and provider workflows and the maturity of the certification program.

Volunteer Opportunities Abound

Much of CCHIT's work is done through volunteer work groups. The groups are responsible for the development of criteria and inspection processes for differing domains. Work group members assess current health IT trends, review available standards and use cases, draft certification requirements, and develop test scripts for use in product inspection.

CCHIT reorganizes and reconstitutes its work groups annually in the spring. Volunteers are welcome to apply for one or more groups and roles. HIM professionals can apply for volunteer positions when CCHIT opens applications this year from March 23 through April 20.

Twelve work groups are currently well under way for 2009 program development:

- Ambulatory EHR—developing criteria and test scripts for the certification of EHRs used in physician offices
- Inpatient EHR—developing criteria and test scripts for certification of EHRs used in acute hospital settings
- Health information exchange—developing criteria and test scripts for health information exchange networks
- Interoperability—working with all CCHIT work groups to ensure data portability
- Security—advising all work groups on security requirements
- Behavioral health—developing criteria and test scripts for optional EHR certification for the behavioral health population
- Child health—developing criteria and test scripts for optional EHR certification for the child health population that span physician specialty practices and care settings
- Cardiovascular medicine—recommending optional EHR criteria and test scripts for the unique needs of office-based cardiovascular practice
- Emergency department—developing criteria and test scripts that support and certify products used in the treatment and care of emergency department populations
- Personal health records—developing criteria and test scripts for PHRs, especially privacy requirements, as more and more patients seek to access their health information online
- Privacy and compliance—advising all work groups on criteria that address patient confidentiality and compliance issues
- Electronic prescribing—developing criteria and test scripts to certify standalone e-prescribing products

By becoming involved, HIM professionals can advocate for key documentation practices that support data integrity within the EHR. HIM input can contribute to both the domain-focused work groups (such as ambulatory or inpatient) as well as the

expertise-based work groups (such as privacy and compliance, security, and interoperability).

HIM professionals who volunteer with CCHIT will learn valuable industry information that will assist in the development of a robust system of electronic health records. By taking part in this critical process HIM professionals can better serve their own organization and others by sharing the core principles of information management that contribute to the development of a legal electronic health record.

Now is the time for HIM professionals to become actively involved with establishing EHR standards. The healthcare industry continues to move forward with EHR adoption, and HIM professionals are in a unique position to provide knowledge and support to these activities.

Cassi Birnbaum (cbirnbaum@chsd.org) is the director of HIM and privacy officer at Rady Children's Hospital and cochair of CCHIT's Privacy and Compliance Work Group. **Terri Hall** (terri.hall@ihs.gov) is HIM/RM consultant for Billings Area Indian Health Services. **Helayne Sweet** (hsweet@healthshare.com) is a senior associate for Booz Allen Hamilton. **Lou Ann Wiedemann** (lou-ann.wiedemann@ahima.org) is director of professional practice resources at AHIMA.

Article citation:

Birnbaum, Cassi L; Hall, Terri; Sweet, Helayne; Wiedemann, Lou Ann. "Health IT Certification Developments: CCHIT's Current Work and How to Get Involved" *Journal of AHIMA* 80, no.3 (March 2009): 56-57.

Driving the Power of Knowledge

Copyright 2022 by The American Health Information Management Association. All Rights Reserved.