The 63rd REC: http://healthit.gov

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By Kevin Heubusch

In a January 6 blog post, Farzad Mostashari, MD, national coordinator for health IT, summarized a busy year at his office, highlighting 10 of 2011's "most notable developments in the world of health information technology and ONC."

Among these were 62 regional health IT extension centers, which by the end of 2011 had enrolled more than 116,000 primary care providers in their effort to help small practices and critical access hospitals participate in the meaningful use program.

Mostashari also cited the "virtual 63rd REC," or www.healthit.gov. The site is part of ONC's outreach campaign, educating providers on the value of health IT, reviewing the meaningful use program, and offering basic resources for selecting and implementing EHRs. The site also features a public-facing side, providing consumers with information on the value and uses of health IT.

Providers considering or planning an EHR implementation can take advantage of the site's resources; other professionals who are in discussions about the value of health IT can reference its talking points.

Do not confuse *healthit.gov* with *healthit.hhs.gov*, which is ONC's main site, providing more comprehensive program information, news, and policy development for meaningful use and additional health IT initiatives.

The National Learning Consortium

The implementation resources on healthit.gov come from the National Learning Consortium. NLC distributes lessons learned and resources developed in ONC's outreach programs, including the RECs, Beacon Communities, and the state health information exchange initiative.

All RECs are required to participate in the consortium, whose work is in turn facilitated by a virtual resource center called the Health Information Technology Research Center. Under the terms of the REC program, HITRC facilitates the collection and sharing of best practices among the RECs. Shared resources include templates, guides, model contracts, and other informational, educational, outreach, and implementation support products. NLC works with ONC to distribute selected resources beyond the RECs.

The resources available on healthit.gov thus are "field tested" and proven, as NLC describes them on the site. As the RECs advance in their work, NLC plans to offer resources that address broader EHR implementation issues including interoperability, information exchange, and quality improvement.

One Program, Many Sites

health IT Web sites abound within the Department of Health and Human Services. Much of the information on the meaningful use program appears on four primary sites published by CMS and ONC, largely distinguished by their intended audience and use. ONC's main site (healthit.hhs.gov) offers the most comprehensive information for those interested in the development of the program and other federal health IT initiatives. CMS's EHR Incentives site (www.cms.gov/EHRIncetivePrograms) is likely the best resource for providers who want to participate in the program.

Site	Description

www.healthit.gov	ONC's public outreach site offering providers and consumers education on the value of health IT. It also offers providers information and implementation resources for the meaningful use program.
http://healthit.hhs.gov	ONC's main site, consolidating program information, news, and policy development for the broad healthcare industry.
https://ehrincentives.cms.gov	CMS's registration and attestation system for participants in the meaningful use program.
www.cms.gov/EHRIncentivePrograms	CMS's informational site on meaningful use, directed primarily at providers.

Tools for Starting the Transition

The implementation resources on healthit.gov are presented in three steps: "Learn EHR Basics," "Start Your Transition to EHRs," and "Get Implementation Support."

The majority of tools currently appear in the transition step, which is subdivided into five additional steps: assessing practice readiness, planning the approach, selecting an EHR, conducting training and implementing the EHR, and achieving meaningful use. Given that RECs primarily have been working with practices in the early stages of EHR adoption, most currently available tools relate to planning the approach and selecting products.

Workflow redesign templates, for example, come packaged in a PowerPoint presentation that mixes 30 slides of instructions and sample workflow diagrams. The diagrams may be edited using PowerPoint. Meaningful use objectives are mapped to relevant sections of the workflow. In the case of the discharge process:

- Core 1-Use CPOE for medication orders
- Core 4-Generate and transmit permissible prescriptions electronically (eRx)
- Core 13-Provide clinical summaries for each office visit
- Menu 8-Provide a summary of care record for each transition of care or referral
- Menu 9-Capability to submit electronic data to immunization registries or immunization information systems
- Menu 10-Capability to submit electronic syndromic surveillance data to public health agencies

At press time, NLC had published three tools for use in selecting or upgrading a certified EHR system:

- Vendor evaluation matrix-a general evaluation tool to rate basic functionalities on a scale from 1 to 5
- Vendor compare tool-an evaluation of functionalities of meaningful use guidelines within the EHR on a scale from 1 to 5
- Vendor pricing template-a tool to determine line item costs for software purchase, implementation, training, and support for both vendor licensing models and vendor SAAS models

There is no schedule for the release of new material; NLC encourages users to check the site frequently for updates.

Reference

Mostashari, Farzad. "12 Months of Health Information Technology: A Year of Momentous Progress." January 6, 2012. www.healthit.gov/buzz-blog.

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