

EHR Mobility for Big ROI

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With the transition to electronic health records mandated by the US government, healthcare providers must invest heavily to make the switch. Including a mobility solution can turn a big EHR investment into an even bigger return.



American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009

When the government enacted the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) in February in order to stimulate the economy and invest in infrastructure, it set aside incentive funds for healthcare providers implementing a government-certified electronic health records (EHR) system. With a total of \$147.7 billion allocated to healthcare and \$19 billion pegged specifically for health information

technology (HIT), the Act evidences a move toward real improvements in healthcare quality.

According to the recent PricewaterhouseCoopers US report "Rock and a Hard Place: An analysis of the \$36 billion impact from Health IT stimulus funding," ARRA includes the goal of modernizing healthcare and reducing long-term costs through the use of information technology. Despite these well-intentioned ambitions, many healthcare organizations will likely find difficulty in coming up with the necessary funding to purchase EHR systems, comply with the government standards and make sure their system works well with others. Overall, the Act will have the most benefit for organizations with EHR systems already in place because theirs will be closer to the "interoperability standards," thereby receiving the most funding.

As the title of the PricewaterhouseCoopers report suggests, the plan sets aside a \$36 billion stimulus package for early adopters of the government-certified systems and it has admirable objectives. President Barack Obama stated in his joint address to Congress this year, "Our recovery plan will invest in electronic health records and new technology that will reduce errors, bring down cost, ensure privacy and save lives." In order to put the plan in motion, the HITECH Act pushes physicians to adopt an EHR system by offering incentive payments to those who do and later reducing Medicare payments to those who do not.

Yet even with the benefit of stimulus incentives, most healthcare organizations will find for the short-term, they are on the losing end of the equation. Government funding will not immediately offset the cost of implementing the system. However, one good – or better – piece of news hails from the IT mobility sector. Experts in IT mobility suggest that adding mobility solutions to existing and new EHR systems can make the difference in showing return on investment sooner rather than later. The trick is to locate a mobility solution that is efficient and cost-effective to implement.

Despite the fact that using an EHR can reduce errors and make access to shared information easier, healthcare providers cite funding as an obstacle to implementing a new system. The ARRA provides funds to healthcare providers that implement a government-certified EHR system because in order to make EHRs the most beneficial to the US healthcare system overall, most healthcare organizations would need to be using these interoperable systems. Obviously, the switch across the sector cannot occur overnight.

When the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information (ONC) surveyed healthcare providers who had already implemented an EHR system, the findings showed that initially gains in efficiency were limited by a slowdown during the implementation of the system. Additionally, funds and time were required to train staff and maintain the system. The survey showed that overall; providers did not receive financial benefit from instigating an EHR system. Financial benefits have a better chance of occurring among large healthcare institutions. Nonetheless, these systems do bring healthcare to a better level.

Government Incentives Will Not Cover Costs of EHR Implementation

While there is no question whether EHR systems will lead to big gains for the US healthcare system overall, the PricewaterhouseCoopers US report explains that the incentives won't actually cover the costs of implementing the system. Still, with Medicare reimbursement penalties for those who do not comply and a deadline of 2015, healthcare providers don't have much choice other than to get on the IT ball.

Unfortunately, PricewaterhouseCoopers says that the stimulus finding for health IT is a "small carrot" compared to the amount of resources it will take to get the technology up and running in time. Providers who do not use government-certified EHRs by 2015 will face penalties.

PricewaterhouseCoopers' analysis shows that the stimulus incentives to comply with the new requirements for setting up and maintaining EHRs do not come near to compensating the overall costs. When added to the possibility of future penalties from reduced Medicare reimbursement, the situation becomes more extreme. Medicare penalties will begin in 2015 and be fully implemented by 2017.

Physicians can receive up to \$44,000 each for adopting certified EHR systems, but their overall costs will exceed these incentives. PricewaterhouseCoopers estimates a total cost range for a three-physician practice at \$173,750 to \$296,000. Considering the hefty upfront investment of implementing an EHR system, adding a mobility solution from a middleware provider can make the expense more cost-effective in the long run, but also bring faster benefits in the short term.

Mobility Solutions Add Efficiency and Financial Benefit to EHR System

An EHR solution alone can reduce administration costs by up to 50 percent, but taking that EHR mobile allows multiple providers to quickly and easily access the records. This greatly increases the return on investment.

Working with a middleware product allows the EHR system to become mobile with virtually no development time because the applications have already been created and are continuously updated to work with new software and hardware. Mobility makes the upfront cost of implementing an EHR system, a move toward both time and cost efficiency.

Mobility Solutions Make Vital Step Forward in Future of US Healthcare IT

When considering the EHR options, healthcare organizations are left with little choice but to comply within the next six years. As providers make the sizable investment in an EHR system, they will want to receive all of the benefits possible. By adding a mobility solution upfront, providers can immediately begin to see even more increased efficiency and return on investment. Tapping into the government incentives and avoiding the loss of Medicare benefits are just the beginning of what healthcare IT has to offer providers and patients. Implementing a mobility solution and get providers on a much faster road to HIT success.

