

News Currents

In Brief

Brailer Discusses Outlook For Health IT In 2005

David Brailer, MD, the national coordinator for health information technology, set out his goals for the year ahead in a keynote address at the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society Annual Conference and Exhibition in Dallas.

While noting significant progress toward health information technology (IT) adoption in the past year, Brailer also identified key challenges. He said that an “adoption gap” between large and small physician practices was a potential problem, citing research that estimates 57 percent of large group practices with 50 or more physicians have implemented electronic records, yet only 13 percent of solo practitioners have installed the technology.

Brailer expressed concern that “proprietary boundaries are growing around health information at the same time that talk about interoperability has become commonplace.” He emphasized the urgency of developing interoperability and noted that stand-alone electronic health records will not deliver the cost savings, error reductions, and systems change that health IT promises. He also discussed the importance of addressing privacy and information control.

Brailer promised that his office would be releasing a strategic plan this year focusing in the short term on electronic medical records adoption, interoperability, and streamlining federal health information systems.

—Kathleen Vickery

In Brief

GAO Sees Health Care Savings, Improved Efficiencies In IT

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently analyzed the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) estimate that information technology (IT) could save the nation \$140 billion annually in health care costs. GAO stated that IT can improve the efficiency and quality of medical care and that the potential for substantial savings is promising. The analysis was the result of GAO's ongoing effort to provide the House of Representatives Budget Committee Chairman Jim Nussle with an overview of HHS' efforts to develop a national health IT strategy, identify lessons learned from the Department of Veterans' Affairs and Defense regarding their use of electronic health records, and identify lessons learned from international efforts to modernize national health IT infrastructures.

People With Disabilities May Get Waiting-List Relief

The state of Connecticut has reached a tentative settlement of a class action lawsuit seeking elimination of a waiting list for community-based services—including residential settings—for people with developmental disabilities.

The proposed five-year, \$41 million settlement would reduce, or even eliminate, the waiting lists that for some of the 1,064 individuals have restricted them for as long as 15 years.

Over each of the next five years, and at an annual cost (mostly to Medicaid) of about \$4.5 million, the state would remove about 150 more individuals from the waiting list, if the settlement becomes final.

LTC Insurance Remains Low Priority, Study Finds

Seventy-five percent of U.S. adults believe they are unlikely to ever need long term care (LTC) services,

according to a new survey from the USAA Life Insurance Co., based in San Antonio, Texas.

“Long term care is costly, and research shows that while more than half of the population will likely need it, only 35 percent of adults have pur-

chased, or considered purchasing, long term care insurance to help cover these costs,” said Kristi Matus, president of USAA Life Insurance.

An independent research company conducted the survey.

—Kathleen Vickery