



SEP 22 2004

John Lumpkin, M.D., M.P.H.
Chairman
National Committee on Vital and Health Statistics
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Dear Dr. Lumpkin:

Thank you for your recent letters outlining recommendations from the National Committee on Vital and Health Statistics (NCVHS) for Patient Medical Record Information (PMRI) standards. Your letters contain recommendations for a core set of PMRI standards, a policy of guidance and incentives for encouraging use of the standards, suggestions for mapping among the various terminology standards, and areas for further research. You also recommend that I designate the National Library of Medicine (NLM) as the central coordinating body within HHS for PMRI terminology standards. When I received your recommendations initially, I referred them to the federal Consolidated Health Informatics (CHI) Council for consideration in our various data standards initiatives. I am pleased to report that many of your recommendations for standards adoption and mapping are now being implemented within those initiatives.

I am convinced that to accomplish the objectives of major initiatives underway with respect to improving health care quality, patient safety and public health preparedness, practical improvements in the information architecture and technology used by the health care industry are required. Accordingly, I have taken several actions to promote and accelerate the application of health information technology, focusing attention on the development and adoption of data standards that can support the interoperable exchange of clinical and health information. Of course, as work progresses in the development and implementation of such standards and technologies, we will continue to require that the privacy of the information will be effectively protected.

Through the federal inter-agency Consolidated Health Informatics initiative, progress on clinical data standards is now well underway. Chaired by HHS, the CHI initiative is one of the federal e-gov initiatives established by OMB. The initiative relies on the advice of the NCVHS for identifying and adopting clinical data standards that might be adopted for use within the federal health care enterprise. During my Secretarial Summit on Health Information Technology on May 6, I was pleased to announce a suite of 15 additional CHI clinical data standards for use in the federal health care enterprise, bringing the total number of domain area standards adopted through the CHI initiative to 20. Consistent with your recommendations for core terminology standards, the CHI standards include the Systematized Nomenclature of Medicine - Clinical Terms (SNOMED CT), Logical Observation Identifiers Names and Codes (LOINC), and several

federal drug terminologies. Although the CHI standards only apply to federal health care agencies and programs, we expect that their adoption by the federal government will provide an impetus to the industry and create momentum to accelerate the convergence and voluntary adoption of these standards in the industry broadly.

During that summit, I also introduced Dr. David Brailer as the first National Health Information Technology Coordinator at HHS, a position established by the President's Executive Order of April 27. The Executive Order directed HHS to report within 90 days on the development and implementation of a strategic plan to guide the nationwide implementation of HIT in both the public and private sectors. On July 21, at our HIT Summit and National Health Information Infrastructure Conference, we unveiled the progress report called for in the Executive Order on a framework for strategic action in health information technology. The strategy includes a major commitment to interoperability standards as well as several actions to accelerate progress.

As you requested in your letter, I have asked the NLM to serve as the central coordinating body within HHS for PMRI terminologies. Similarly, I have asked my agencies to review the mapping and research aspects of your recommendations and several of those mapping recommendations currently are being implemented by the NLM.

I look forward to further advice from the NCVHS. Please express my gratitude to all of the members of the Committee for their hard work and dedication.

Sincerely,

/s/

Tommy G. Thompson