July 21, 2010

Dear HRSA Grantee,

On July 13th, the Electronic Health Records (EHR) Incentive Program Final Rule, often referred to as the "Meaningful Use" rule, was released by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).

The rule provides guidelines for eligible health professionals and hospitals to adopt and meaningfully use certified electronic health record technology to help improve the quality, safety and efficiency of healthcare services. The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), CMS and the Office of the National Coordinator (ONC) recognize this transformational opportunity to improve our healthcare delivery system.   HRSA supports the goal of achieving meaningful use of EHRs for all of its grantees and the providers in the safety net community.

The leadership of HRSA, CMS and ONC collaborated closely on the implementation of the health IT provisions of the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act of 2009. Collectively these provisions are referred to as the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) Act. We are working together to provide the necessary assistance and technical support to providers, including grantees of the various bureaus of HRSA such as Bureau of Primary Health Care (BPHC), Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB), HIV/AIDS Bureau (HAB), Healthcare Systems Bureau (HSB), Bureau of Health Professions (BHPr), Bureau of Clinician Recruitment and Service (BCRS), and the Office of Rural Health Policy (ORHP) as well as other providers of the safety net community.   HRSA, CMS and ONC are aligned in their goals in offering assistance to HRSA grantees and providers of the safety net community.

HRSA, CMS and ONC offer a multitude of resources for HRSA grantees. ONC has established sixty health information technology Regional Extension Centers (RECs) that offer technical assistance, guidance, and information on best practices to support and accelerate health care providers' efforts to become meaningful users of electronic health records (EHR). Each of the sixty RECs serves a defined geographic area across the country, providing coverage in virtually all of the United States.

The RECs are designed to ensure that primary care providers who need help are provided with on-the-ground support for the adoption and meaningful use of EHR systems. The goal of the program is to provide education, outreach and support services in order to help at least 100,000 primary care providers to achieve meaningful EHR use within two years. RECs may also provide educational support to other providers who may need local guidance.

Under the State Cooperative Agreements of the HITECH Act, RECs serve as independent resources to specifically help your organization successfully implement health information technology. **We ask that you actively engage your local REC to receive needed information, education, and technical support** For more information and to find your local REC, please visit http://healthit.hhs.gov/programs/rec**.**

Representatives from the RECs are now available to support primary care providers in your state or region with direct, individualized, and on-site technical assistance in:
- Selecting a certified EHR product that offers best value for the providers' needs;
- Achieving effective implementation of a certified EHR product;
- Enhancing clinical and administrative workflows to maximize the potential of an EHR system to improve quality and value of care; and
- Observing and complying with applicable legal, regulatory, professional, and ethical requirements to protect the integrity, privacy, and security of patients' health information.

Please take advantage of this valuable resource and arrange an introductory meeting with representatives from your corresponding REC.

In order to directly accelerate the success of States' Medicaid EHR Incentive Programs, CMS is also providing enhanced matching funds to State Medicaid agencies to support reasonable, approvable expenses related to providing oversight, administering payments, and the promotion of EHRs and health information exchange. It is important to note that this program is voluntary for States and each State's timeline may be different. Most States have already received Federal funds to begin developing a State Medicaid HIT Plan (SMHP), which will be a roadmap for their program. HRSA Grantees should be engaged with their colleagues in Medicaid to provide input into their SMHPs and to coordinate efforts and leverage Federal HIT funding. **To get engaged in their planning process, and for questions related to the Medicaid EHR Incentive Program, including a timeline, eligibility, reporting, payment and how to obtain technical assistance for non-primary care provider staff, please contact your State Medicaid Agency.**

Additionally, in 1993, HRSA established Health Center Controlled Networks (HCCNs) to promote the use of health information technology by providing management, financial, technology and clinical support services to HRSA grantees.   For other resources including downloadable toolkits, guides and reference tools to assist in the adoption and implementation of EHRs   please visit www.hrsa.gov/healthitandquality. Finally, we would like to extend an invitation to you to participate in a joint HRSA/CMS/ONC Webinar:

"The CMS 'Meaningful Use' Rule, the ONC EHR Standards and Certification Rule and How They Affect the Safety Net Community and HRSA Grantees"

Date: July 23rd, 2010

Time: 2:00 pm – 4:00 pm EST

Presenters include:

- Dr. Carol Bean from the Office of National Coordinator will present on the EHR Standards and Certification Final Rule

- Ms. Jessica Kahn, Michelle Mills and Elizabeth Holland from the Centers for Medicare &Medicaid Services will present on the EHR Incentive Program final rule.

To register for the event, please visit:
https://ohitevents.webex.com/ohitevents/onstage/g.php?t=a&d=999539455

To ask a question for the webinar or provide feedback on how we can support your efforts to achieve meaningful use, please email healthit@hrsa.gov.

This important webinar will be placed on the HRSA's YouTube (http://www.youtube.com/hrsatube) channel for replay. During the months of August and September, HRSA will hold additional technical assistance webinars and conference calls with staff from HRSA, ONC, and, CMS to further answer the safety net community's questions regarding all aspects of these important new regulations. Please check out all of our websites for more information and future updates:
HRSA: www.hrsa.gov/healthitandquality CMS: http://www.cms.gov/EHRIncentivePrograms
ONC: http://healthit.hhs.gov/programs/rec

We want to take this opportunity to extend our appreciation to you for your ongoing dedication to delivering the highest quality patient care and commitment to improving our health care system.

Sincerely,

Mary Wakefield, Ph.D., R.N.
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David Blumenthal, M.D., M.P.P.
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