

Financial Incentives for Adoption of Electronic Health Records - Meaningful Use: Stage 1 Criteria

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Insight — 2/2/2010 12:00:00 AM

The long awaited Meaningful Use Criteria were published by the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as proposed regulations on January 13, 2010. The proposed regulations set forth a set of objectives and measures characterized as Stage 1 Criteria that must be met by eligible professionals (EP) and hospitals that desire to receive incentive payments for adoption and implementation of certified electronic health records (EHR). HHS intends to raise the bar regarding meaningful use objectives and measures by publishing Stage 2 Criteria in 2013 and Stage 3 Criteria in 2015. Because these regulations are "proposed," they may change. However, since the regulations implement a statutory mandate, it is not expected that the final regulations regarding meaningful use will be significantly different from the proposed regulations.

The criteria consist of 17 different objectives and measures, each of which must be satisfied by a hospital or EP desiring to receive incentive payments. There are 8 additional objectives and measures that must each be satisfied by EPs and 6 additional objectives and measures that must be satisfied by hospitals including critical access hospitals desiring to receive incentive payments. Listing each of these objectives and measures is beyond the scope of this article. The objectives can be found in a table at Federal Register, Vol. 75, No. 8, Wednesday, January 13, 2010, pages 1867 to 1870.

There is an exception to the need to demonstrate meaningful use in order to receive an incentive payment. This exception applies to Medicaid incentive payments in those state Medicaid programs that choose to implement incentive payments. The exception provides that EPs, hospitals and CAHs can receive an incentive payment in the first payment year under a Medicaid incentive program by adopting, implementing or upgrading Certified EHR technology in their first payment year. In subsequent payment years the EP, hospital or CAH must satisfy the meaningful use objectives and measures.

Demonstration that an EP, hospital or CAH satisfies the meaningful use objectives and measures is through an attestation that the EP, hospital or CAH satisfied each applicable objective and associated measure during the EHR reporting period.

For additional information or questions, contact:

William H. Fischer
303-295-8338
whfischer@hollandhart.com

Matthew G. Weber
303-295-8565
mweber@hollandhart.com

Berna Rhodes-Ford
702-222-2582
brhodesford@hollandhart.com

Robert C. Anderson
702-222-2520
BAnderson@hollandhart.com

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