

Budget Plan Takes First Step Toward IT Network

President's initiatives are aimed at local health information networks, not individual practices.

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WASHINGTON — President Bush's 2006 budget request includes several initiatives to get providers to adopt standards-based, interoperable electronic health records systems.

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) is currently directing \$14 million of this year's budget to jump-start regional collaborations that would assist health care providers in employing these types of systems. To continue these activities outside of AHRQ in 2006, the budget proposal includes a new \$75 million account in the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology.

Although primary care groups have shown a great deal of interest in a national information technology (IT) health care network, language in the budget isn't likely to affect the individual physician's office—at least not directly, Robert Tennant, senior policy advisor for the

Medical Group Management Association (MGMA), said in an interview.

"This will be targeted to the local health information networks that David J. Brailer [the federal coordinator for health IT] has been promoting. That's very different from promoting use in an individual practice," Mr. Tennant said at the annual conference of the National Academy of Social Insurance.

The hope is these initiatives will produce a network to enhance patient care and encourage practices to spend the money on infrastructures that would link them to this type of network, Mr. Tennant said.

The fact that Dr. Brailer's office is receiving funding at all means that this issue is on the president's radar screen, "considering that appropriations had eliminated funding for the program in 2005," Bob Doherty, senior vice president for governmental affairs and public policy with the American College of Physicians, said in an interview.

Primary care groups such as the ACP

and the American Academy of Family Physicians have been actively promoting the use of IT systems to improve the quality of care. Both are collaborating with health care contractors on a federal project to test financial incentives and technology support to improve care of patients with chronic disease.

In 2004, the ACP released to Congress a plan for promoting a paperless system. According to the college, some of those ideas were recently incorporated into a bill introduced by Rep. John M. McHugh (R-N.Y.) and Rep. Charles Gonzales (D-

Tex.) to encourage health care providers to adopt interoperable health care IT systems.

Although it's encouraging that the federal government has shown an interest in IT, Mr. Tennant noted that the proposed allocations in the 2006 budget proposal aren't nearly enough to promote its widespread use.

"To offer some perspective, one of MGMA's member practices just spent \$140 million for an IT system. That's more than what the entire budget allocates for the country," he said. ■

F Y I

Psoriasis Guide Updated

The National Psoriasis Foundation has updated and released the "Psoriasis and Psoriatic Arthritis Pocket Guide: Treatment Algorithms and Management Options" to include information on the use of biologic treatments that have become available since the first guide was issued in 2002. To get a copy, send an e-mail to physicians@psoriasis.org or call 800-723-9166.

Guidebook Addresses Older Patients

The National Institute on Aging has released a clinician's handbook that provides tips and strategies for treating older patients. "Working With Your Older Patient" addresses difficult-to-discuss issues, provides tips to improve adherence, and lists additional resources. Order a copy by calling 800-222-2225 or visiting www.niapublications.org.

'Talking With Your Doctor'

The National Institute on Aging has released a Spanish version of its "Talking With Your Doctor" publication. The brochure addresses such areas as choosing a physician, working with an interpreter, discussing sensitive issues (memory loss, incontinence, or sexuality), and finding additional health information in Spanish. To order the publication, visit www.niapublications.org/pubs/conversando/index.asp.

Promote Hand Washing

The American Society for Microbiology has launched "Take Action: Clean Hands Campaign" to promote hand washing. The campaign includes educational materials for health care professionals and consumers (posters, brochures, stickers). Those who would like more information can visit www.washup.org.

PRODUCTS

Broad-Spectrum Sunscreen for Kids

Blue Lizard Baby Australian Suncream blocks up to 99% of UVA light with micronized zinc oxide and titanium dioxide. The sunscreen contains no chemical absorbers or fragrance and is available in 5-ounce and 1.5-ounce sizes. For more information, contact Crown Laboratories Inc. by calling 800-877-8869 or by visiting the company's Web site at www.bluelizard.net.

Prescription-Only Acne Products

Zoderm 6.5% cream, cleanser, and gel combine benzoyl peroxide with urea to treat acne. The products are available by prescription only. For more information, contact Bradley Pharmaceuticals Inc. by visiting www.bradpharm.com or calling 800-929-9300.

Dry Skin Relief

Umecta (urea, 40%) emulsion contains omega-6 essential fatty acids for the treatment of moderately to severely dry skin. The emulsion comes in an 8-ounce tube. For more information, contact JSJ Pharmaceuticals by visiting www.umecta.com or by calling 800-499-4468.

Gel Inhibits Acne Triggers

The new acne treatment—pHaze 35 acne gel—contains ingredients to control sebum, cell turnover, bacterial growth, and inflammation. The gel includes extracts

of licorice root, burnet, cinnamon, and ginger, along with 2% salicylic acid and 5% azelaic acid. For more information, contact Physician's Choice of Arizona Inc. by calling 877-722-7546 or by visiting www.pcaskin.com.

Unscented Hand Sanitizer Line

A new unscented alcohol hand sanitizer formula is available from Sprixx for use with its line of body-worn sanitizers. The formula is 63% ethyl alcohol and contains emollients. For more information, contact Sprixx by calling 866-477-7499 or by sending an e-mail to info@sprixx.com.

Dual-Wavelength Laser

The VariLite laser offers 532-nm and 940-nm wavelengths for treatment of 19 dermatology indications, including vascular lesions, leg veins, and moderate inflammatory acne vulgaris. For more information, contact Iridex Corp. by calling 650-962-8100 or e-mailing info@iridex.com.

Instant Topical Anesthetic

Pain Ease is an instant topical anesthetic for use on skin and mucous membranes. It comes in a mist or medium spray and controls pain related to injections, minor wounds, minor surgical procedures, and venipuncture. Contact Gebauer Co. by visiting www.gebauerco.com or by calling 800-321-9348.

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