

White House Announces Health IT Grants

BY JOYCE FRIEDEN

The White House is trying to get health care workers ready to help physicians in computerizing their medical records.

Nearly \$1 billion in American Reinvestment and Recovery Act awards will be made to help health care providers become "meaningful users" of health information technology and to train nurses

and other allied health professionals for careers in health information technology. Jobs created will include nurses, pharmacy technicians, and IT technicians and trainers, according to Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and Labor Secretary Hilda Solis.

"These investments will serve to train almost 50,000 workers in Department of Labor programs plus thousands more hired for HHS regional extension centers

in the months ahead," Jared Bernstein, chief economist to Vice President Joe Biden, said in a teleconference. "By providing seed capital, we are helping to seed an emerging industry that will create new jobs well after the Recovery Act has ended."

Under the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health Act (HITECH), a part of the 2009 federal stimulus law, physicians who treat

Medicare patients can receive up to \$44,000 over 5 years for the meaningful use of a certified health information system. Those whose populations are made up of at least 30% Medicaid patients can earn up to \$64,000 in incentive payments for their use of the technology.

The proposed regulations include a definition of meaningful use and outline other criteria for obtaining the full incentive payments.

The awards, which were announced Feb. 12, include more than \$750 million in HHS grants. Of that, \$386 million will go to 40 states and their designated entities to help develop state-level health information exchanges (HIE), and another \$375 million will be awarded to 32 nonprofit organizations to support the development of regional extension centers (REC), which will aid providers in using health information technology. Additional HIE and REC awards will be announced soon, according to a statement.

The grants will make it easier for physicians who are just getting started with electronic health records, Ms. Sebelius told this publication. "The people who will be trained by the grants ... will actually provide the kind of hands-on technical support we think providers need to make this transition. It's not just that the act gives physicians financial incentives to buy a computer and plug it in; we understand the steps along the way of reorganizing workflow and retraining staff that are going to require hands-on support. So the money going out is to establish an on-the-ground program for that kind of

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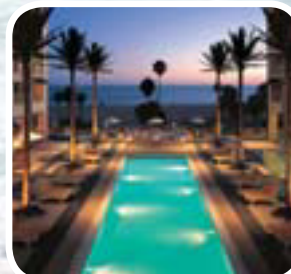
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