UPMC PRACTICE SOLUTIONS

Electronic Health Record (EHR) Reference Guide and FAQs

UPMC Practice Solutions is pleased to share with you the following answers to frequently asked questions about Electronic Health Records and Health Information Technology.

Why is health information technology important to my practice?

Health information technology (HIT) allows comprehensive management of medical information and its secure exchange between health care consumers and providers. Broad use of HIT has the potential to:

- improve health care quality,
- prevent medical errors,
- increase the efficiency of care provision,
- reduce unnecessary health care costs,
- increase administrative efficiencies,
- decrease paperwork,
- expand access to affordable care, and
- improve population health.

What is HITECH?

The Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) Act seeks to improve American health care delivery and patient care through an unprecedented investment in health information technology. The provisions of the HITECH Act are specifically designed to work together to provide the necessary assistance and technical support to providers, enable coordination and alignment within and among states, establish connectivity to the public health community in case of emergencies, and assure the workforce is properly trained and equipped to be meaningful users of EHRs. Combined, these programs build the foundation for every American to benefit from an electronic health record, as part of a modernized, interconnected, and vastly improved system of care delivery.

What is ONC?

The Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) not only coordinates a variety of programs to implement HITECH, but also supports the efforts of several related initiatives to facilitate nationwide adoption of HIT. Through working with these initiatives, ONC is able to reach diverse stakeholder groups that are imperative to the success of the HITECH Act.

What is the state program for health information exchange, or HIE?

The State Health Information Exchange Cooperative Agreements Program is designed to promote health information exchange (HIE) that will advance mechanisms for information sharing across the health care system. The government believes that one of the fundamental steps to improving health care quality and efficiency is through the widespread adoption and meaningful use of HIT. The overall purpose of this program is to facilitate and expand the secure electronic movement and use of health information among organizations according to nationally recognized standards. This program will be a federal-state collaboration with the long-term goal of nationwide HIE and interoperability.

The vision for HIE in Pennsylvania is to strengthen the health care system through the timely, secure, and authorized exchange of patient health information among health care providers.

What are RECs?

RECs are Health Information Technology Regional Extension Centers. Established by a grant from the Health Information Technology Extension Program, RECs 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 (EHRs).

What is SHARP?

SHARP is short for the Strategic Health IT Advanced Research Projects, a grant program to fund research focused on achieving breakthrough advances to address well-documented problems that have impeded HIT adoption, specifically: 1) security of health information technology; 2) patient-centered cognitive support; 3) health care application and network platform architectures; and 4) secondary use of EHR data.

Are there education and training opportunities with HITECH?

As components of the Health IT Workforce Program, there are several grant programs designed to provide individuals with training and education related to HITECH:

- **Community College Consortia to Educate Health Information Technology Professionals Program:** This effort seeks to rapidly create or expand existing health IT education and training programs at community colleges. Community colleges funded under this initiative will establish intensive, non-degree training programs that can be completed in six months or less.

- **Curriculum Development Centers Program:** It provides $10 million in grants to institutions of higher education (or consortia thereof) to support health information technology curriculum development.

- **Program of Assistance for University-Based Training:** This will rapidly increase the availability of individuals qualified to serve in specific health information technology professional roles requiring university-level training.

- **Competency Examination for Individuals Completing Non-Degree Training Program:** This program will provide $6 million in grants to an institution of higher education (or consortia thereof) to support the development and initial administration of a set of health IT competency examinations.

What is Beacon?

The Beacon Community Program is a grant program for communities to build and strengthen their HIT infrastructure and exchange capabilities. These communities will demonstrate the vision of a future where hospitals, clinicians, and patients are meaningful users of HIT, and together the community achieves measurable improvements in health care quality, safety, efficiency, and population health.