

January 14, 2010

Dear CORE Participants and Partners,

Happy New Year!

As you may know, on December 30, 2009, CMS issued a proposed rule regarding the electronic health record (EHR) incentive programs that are a component of the HITECH Act included in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). This part of ARRA outlays an estimated \$44 billion for providers to engage in “meaningful use” of certified EHRs in three phases. On the same day, the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) issued an “interim final rule” establishing the technical specifications for certified EHR technology. The focus of both of these issuances was to establish criteria for the first phase of “meaningful use” with the goal of enhancing the interoperability, functionality, utility and security of health information exchange.

- CMS proposed 25 key high-level objectives for meaningfully using certified EHR technology, while also proposing objective metrics for determining achievement of these goals. Two of these measures are administratively-focused: (1) insurance eligibility must be checked electronically for at least 80% of all unique patients seen by the provider, and (2) at least 80% of all claims must be filed electronically by providers. CAQH worked with you and many of its strategic partners throughout 2009 to ensure the inclusion of eligibility in this first phase of “meaningful use”.
- In the ONC rule, which outlines the detailed specifications needed to support the “meaningful use” functionality requirements, ONC proposed the adoption of the CAQH CORE Phase I operating rules as the implementation specification when conducting eligibility transactions with health plans. This is significant, as CORE is the only implementation specification ONC adopted that was developed by a non-government entity. Additionally, the CORE Phase II Connectivity rule is in alignment with the proposed ONC specification for connectivity.

Comments on both the CMS and ONC issuances are due by March 15th. For the CORE Phase I requirement, ONC specifically requested comments on CORE implementation experience. To this end CAQH has begun collaboration with its members, CORE participants, and strategic partners who have been instrumental to the development of CAQH comments prepared for earlier versions of “meaningful use”. CMS and ONC plan to issue final rules in Spring 2010. Provider payment allocations are scheduled to begin in October 2010.

We are pleased to share this news with you, and will be sending our approach and timeline soliciting your input for consolidated comments to submit to CMS and the ONC. This will include specific questions for implementers and a process to review the draft CAQH response.

CURRENT REQUEST: Please send Lorraine Ramentol (lrammentol@caqh.org) the name of the designated contact for your organization with whom we should coordinate on next steps for meaningful use comments.

Regards,
Harry L. Reynolds, Chair – CORE
Vice President, HIPAA and Information Compliance Officer
Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina