



THIS STORY HAS BEEN FORMATTED FOR EASY PRINTING

## Insurer wants to write off prescription pads

October 28, 2008

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Massachusetts, the state's largest health insurer, will require doctors to adopt computer prescription systems by 2011 if they want to qualify for bonus payments. The change will come a year ahead of a similar requirement by the federal government for doctors who treat patients under Medicare.

Insurers say "e-prescribing" can reduce medication errors, complications from drug interactions and drug allergies, and overall pharmacy costs. In particular, a computerized system is seen as the solution for the problems created by barely legible prescriptions scrawled by doctors.

Dr. John Fallon, chief physician executive of Blue Cross-Blue Shield, said e-prescribing is part of the insurers' larger effort to improve care by awarding doctors bonuses for providing better care.

"Our incentive programs are designed to reward doctors for taking steps to improve the quality of outcomes for patients, and e-prescribing has certainly proven to increase quality of care," Fallon said in a statement.

But the cost - between \$1,000 and \$3,500 per doctor for a stand-alone system that just processes prescriptions - is a major obstacle to swift adoption of the technology. Blue Cross-Blue Shield said it would pay an undisclosed amount to help some doctors pay the software licensing fees for e-prescribing technology.

The seemingly straightforward transition to electronic prescribing faces other hurdles. The federal government prohibits so-called controlled substances from being prescribed electronically, even though one in five prescription drugs falls into that category.

JEFFREY KRASNER ■

© [Copyright](#) 2008 The New York Times Company