

GOVERNMENT HEALTH IT

Law will boost e-prescribing, HHS secretary says

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Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt said today he expects the e-prescribing incentives and penalties in the Medicare bill passed this month to "have a profound effect on the adoption and use of e-prescribing."

Although President Bush vetoed the bill, Congress overrode the veto, and Kerry Weems, acting administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, said at a news conference that the administration supports the bill's e-prescribing provisions and will work to implement them.

Leavitt said CMS will hold a conference sometime this fall on e-prescribing to give doctors an opportunity to air any concerns they might have about the administration's program.

Experts say fewer than 10 percent of doctors use e-prescribing, but the administration wants to increase that percentage. Weems said the technology could save CMS \$156 million in five years.

E-prescribing also has advantages for doctors, patients, pharmacists and those who pay for drug benefits outside Medicare. Dr. James King, a family physician in Tennessee and president of the American Academy of Family Physicians, said at the news conference that e-prescribing "definitely improved the care that I provide to my patients."

However, he acknowledged that he does not always submit prescriptions electronically for a variety of reasons, such as knowing that particular pharmacies do not accept e-prescriptions and the inability to prescribe controlled substances under Drug Enforcement Administration rules.

Under the Medicare bill, doctors who use e-prescribing for Medicare patients will receive a 2 percent bonus in 2009 and 2010, a 1 percent bonus the following two years, and a 0.5 percent bonus in 2013.

Those who don't use e-prescribing will be subject to fee reductions of 1 percent in 2012, 1.5 percent in 2013 and 2 percent thereafter. There is a provision for hardship exemptions.

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