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Health Chief: IT Can Boost Patient Safety, Increase Efficiency

"Greater use of health information technology will translate into much safer and more efficient care," as well as "connect more Americans to information on quality and cost and give them more control over their health care options," HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt writes in a *Des Moines Register* opinion piece.

Leavitt writes that doctors "also benefit from the use of electronic health records," which:

- Keep them "from having to read through pages and pages of handwritten notes";
- Notify them "immediately to dangerous drug interactions and allergies";
- Allow "prescriptions to be sent directly from the handheld (computer) to the pharmacy"; and
- Enable researchers to "track treatment outcomes so that they can learn more quickly from clinical practice what works best."

Leavitt notes that HHS "has helped develop software standards to ensure that electronic health information systems are interoperable" and in 2008 "will be working to expand adoption of certified, interoperable [EHRs] by as many as 1,200 small- and medium-sized physician practices."

According to Leavitt, the use of health IT "is not just about getting computers into doctors' offices. It's about creating interoperable systems connecting the doctor's office with the hospital, the lab, the pharmacy, the researcher and the consumer." He concludes, "That will transform our health care sector to provide better care at lower cost for all Americans" (Leavitt, *Des Moines Register*, 1/31).

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