

Thompson to Payers: Force E-Scripts

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Health insurers should force physicians through reimbursement policies to adopt electronic prescribing technology, former Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson told payers during a keynote presentation June 19 at the America's Health Insurance Plans' Institute 2008 in San Francisco.



Electronic prescriptions can significantly increase the quality, safety and efficiency of care, Thompson noted, but only 8% of doctors e-prescribe. Insurers, however, can compel widespread adoption by paying more to e-prescribers and less to those who still rely on paper, he said. "You, as the controller of who gets paid and how they get paid, can force e-prescribing."

Tying e-prescribing to payment will really change physician practice behavior, said former Sen. John Breaux (D-La.) in a roundtable debate with Thompson and former Senate Majority Leader William Frist, M.D. (R-Tenn.).

Widespread e-prescribing will help to some degree to start bending down the rising curve of health care costs, Breaux said, but so will using information technology to give consumers information they need on pricing and the quality of care.

Breaux and Thompson told attendees that major, systematic change in the health care system is right around the corner, and both predicted congressional passage of a reform bill next year. "2009 will be the biggest year in health care transformation that we've ever seen," Thompson said.

Frist, however, is not so optimistic. The gulf between different philosophies, he noted, remains too large.

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