

MetaStar Aids Physicians in Adoption and Use of EHRs for Quality Improvement

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Electronic health records (EHRs) have multiple advantages, including the potential for higher quality care, improved health outcomes, and increased efficiencies. EHRs can make it easier for patients to access their health care information and for discrete health care organizations to coordinate care. To capture and share patient data efficiently, physicians need an EHR that stores data in a structured format. Structured data allow patient information to easily be retrieved and transferred so that physicians can use the information to benefit the patient. EHRs also can make reporting easier than when using a paper tool, which potentially can support greater population health.

Recognizing that EHR technology is a key tool in health care transformation, MetaStar is working in several areas to assist Wisconsin physicians with adopting and using this technology for quality improvement in their practices. A number of MetaStar's current projects are aimed at supporting physicians in the adoption and full use of EHRs.

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Doctor Gold is senior vice president and chief medical officer for MetaStar, Inc. This material was prepared by MetaStar, the Medicare Quality Improvement Organization for Wisconsin, under contract with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The contents presented do not necessarily reflect CMS policy.

WHITEC

The Wisconsin Health Information Technology Extension Center (WHITEC) is a division of MetaStar. One of 62 Health Information Technology Regional Extension Centers in the country funded through a cooperative agreement with the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology, WHITEC provides subsidized services to primary care physicians, community health centers, and rural hospitals in Wisconsin. The WHITEC team of health IT specialists offers education, outreach, and technical assistance to assist providers in selecting, successfully implementing, and achieving meaningful use of certified EHR products.

For eligible professionals and hospitals who meet meaningful use requirements, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) is making available up to \$27 billion in EHR incentive payments. Medicare-eligible professionals who do not meet the requirements for meaningful use by 2015 are subject to payment adjustments to their Medicare reimbursements that start at 1% per year, up to a maximum 5% annual adjustment. Because of this provision, it is ever more critical for providers to start working toward meaningful use now – earning incentives instead of assuming penalties.

WHITEC currently is working with nearly 1900 primary care providers in Wisconsin to help them adopt EHR technology and to achieve meaningful use Stage 1. The objectives in Stage 1 entail capturing patient data and sharing the data either with the patient or with other health care professionals. But this is the first of 3 stages, and the Stage 2 Notice

of Proposed Rulemaking was released in late February of 2012. As set forth, Stage 2 builds upon the criteria of the first stage, increasing the threshold for performance of existing measures, and increasing requirements for patient engagement and health information exchange. WHITEC is working on the development of additional paid services for specialists, for those looking to achieve Stage 2 meaningful use, and for others.

Immunization Information Systems Innovation Pilot Project

MetaStar was one of two quality improvement organizations in the country selected by CMS for this pilot project, which offers free technical assistance for practices that wish to electronically report adult immunization data to the Wisconsin Immunization Registry (WIR).

WIR, operated by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) and funded in part by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, collects immunization data from public and private health care providers to create complete records for individuals in the state. Providers can access and update vaccination information for their patients; they also can use this information to notify patients who are due or past due for vaccination. Public access can reduce the number of requests to providers for immunization records from their patients and can allow for better coordination of care. DHS recommends that providers offer this service to their patients and participate in efforts to eliminate vaccine-preventable diseases in Wisconsin. Adult vaccinations are particularly important because immunity can begin to fade over time, newer vaccines have

been introduced over the years, age can make individuals more susceptible to serious diseases caused by infections, and some adults were never vaccinated as children.

MetaStar staff are providing free technical assistance and working with organizations' EHR vendors to set up interfaces between their EHRs and WIR and can help them establish electronic batch submissions. With well over 200 sites already recruited, MetaStar is committed to recruiting 400 sites by the end of September 2012. The processes developed in this project are expected to be spread to other states through guidance documents and to be incorporated into future work plans for other organizations across the country, with the goals of increasing efficiency, raising adult immunization rates, and supporting meaningful use of EHRs.

**Quality Improvement
Using HIT in Physician Offices**

A major goal of the US Department of Health and Human Services' National Quality Strategy is better health for people and communities.

One step toward achieving this goal is the best possible prevention and treatment of the leading causes of mortality. Health information technology (HIT) can assist physicians in this endeavor. Consistent with CMS's quality improvement priorities, MetaStar is partnering with physicians, patients, and the community to improve rates of immunizations and cancer screenings and to improve outpatient cardiovascular care.

The focus is on helping health care professionals use their EHRs to assist them with identifying and monitoring who needs to receive vaccinations or treatment interventions. MetaStar offers educational programming, best practices, peer-to-peer review, and intervention tools to assist in using an EHR to improve the use of preventive services and to help patients avoid preventable health care conditions. For example, interventions that include health information technology have the potential to improve immunization or mammography rates through timely notification of providers and patients when preven-

tive care should be scheduled. EHRs can assist with monitoring and managing risk factors for cardiovascular disease such as hypertension or smoking status.

For physician practices with EHRs, MetaStar is assisting with activities related to the Physician Quality Reporting System (PQRS) and improving the use of EHR for care management. Such assistance is intended to promote effective use of health information technology in clinical practice and to help align PQRS reporting requirements with EHR incentives related to meaningful use.

Many of MetaStar's services are available to Wisconsin physician offices at no cost and are coordinated with the efforts of other organizations and initiatives, such as the national Million Hearts Campaign, to minimize demands on health care professionals' time and resources. MetaStar's charter for change incorporates bold goals for improving care, and we believe that EHRs can be a powerful mechanism in the hands of physicians and other providers in achieving these goals.



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