

# Advice Offered on Preparing for EHR Incentives

BY MARY ELLEN SCHNEIDER

In less than 6 months, doctors can begin to qualify for tens of thousands of dollars in incentive payments from the federal government for using electronic health record technology. Many physicians are asking: How do I get ready?

The first step, experts agree, is to prepare your practice. Implementing an electronic health record (EHR) effectively is only partly about the technology, said Mary Griskewicz, senior director for ambulatory information systems at Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS), a non-profit organization.

Most of the work is about reengineering the practice, assessing and changing processes and workflows. "This is not a small task, in particular for small practices," she said.

And before practices jump into an implementation, Dr. Steven Waldren, director of the Center for Health IT at the American Academy of Family Physicians, suggests that they examine their motivation for using an EHR. He cautioned physicians not to do it just to take advantage of the new federal incentives.

Physicians who qualify as "meaningful

users" of EHR technology through the Medicare program can receive up to \$44,000 over 5 years, and those who qualify through the Medicaid program can earn about \$64,000. But that may not cover the costs of a new system, Dr. Waldren said, so physicians should have other reasons for making the switch.

"They shouldn't be doing this for the \$44,000," Dr. Waldren said. "They should be doing it because they believe it's the right thing to do for them, their practice, and their patients. Without that, you don't have the commitment to make it actually happen."

Once a practice has decided to buy an EHR and laid the ground work with the staff, numerous challenges remain. For example, under the HITECH Act, which established the EHR incentive program, physicians can qualify only if they are meaningful users of certified EHR technology. While the government has released regulations defining meaningful use requirements, as well as requirements for certification, there are cur-



rently no certified products on the market. The first products are expected to gain certification sometime this fall, according to the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology, which is shepherding this effort.

But the current lack of certified products shouldn't keep physicians from shopping for a system now, experts said. One way to deal with it

MS. GRISKEWICZ

is to build a guarantee of certification into the contract with the vendor. Physicians just need to be sure to get any assurances in writing, Dr. Waldren said. And they need to be clear on the terms of the guarantee. For example, will the guarantee allow you to get your money back if the vendor fails to become certified or does it allow you to withhold payments until the vendor becomes certified?

Physicians also should look to include service level agreements in their contacts with vendors, Dr. Waldren said. This ensures that the practice will get specific levels of support within certain time

frames. If the company fails to deliver on the promised level of service, the practice might be able to make reduced payments or hold payments until that service level is met. These agreements could become important, Dr. Waldren said, since vendors are likely to be very busy as more practices adopt EHRs over the next few years.

When choosing an EHR product, consider whether the software will fit in with the workflow of the practice and whether it is usable by everyone in the office.

One way to answer some of those questions is to talk to clinicians at other practices who have already implemented the product. It's best to try to find practices that are similar to your own, Ms. Griskewicz said. And ask about integration issues such as how the system will work with existing billing software or how it can help the practice to handle future regulatory changes such as the switch from ICD-9 to ICD-10, she said.

As physicians consider their options, the key is to get educated, Ms. Griskewicz said. She advises seeking out trusted sources such as the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and their medical professional societies, many of which are offering free Webinars, and other online information. ■

## CLASSIFIEDS

www.clinicalneurologynews.com



UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI  
MILLER SCHOOL  
of MEDICINE

### OPPORTUNITY IN DEMENTIA AND BEHAVIORAL NEUROLOGY

**The Esther Lichtenstein Chair in Neurology**  
**Department of Neurology**  
**Miller School of Medicine**  
**University of Miami**

The Department of Neurology at the Miller School of Medicine of the University of Miami is searching for a visionary leader to fill the Esther Lichtenstein Chair in Neurology. Applicants should have a strong track record of independent funding of basic or clinical research in Alzheimer disease and related disorders. The successful applicant will be an Associate Professor or Professor with a vision for developing a collaborative translational research program. Partnerships with well-funded clinical and basic science programs in the Medical School in the fields of neurogenetics, stem cells, neural regeneration, neuroimaging, and translational research are expected.

The successful candidate will lead a multidisciplinary program. The Miller School of Medicine has one of 15 state-supported Florida Memory Clinics and is committed to the development of a premier clinical and research program. Our multidisciplinary effort includes a close collaboration with the department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences with an ACGME-accredited and funded Geriatric Psychiatry fellowship program, as well as one of the largest neurology teaching programs in the country with 40 residents and 15 fellows.

Our excellent salary and compensation package enhances this opportunity to be a part of this vibrant medical center, with truly remarkable leadership committed to achieving both clinical and research missions in dementia, including President Donna Shalala, Dean Pascal Goldschmidt, and the Neurology Chair, Dr. Ralph Sacco.

For consideration, please forward your CV and personal statement to:

Clinton B. Wright, M.D., M.S.  
Chair, Search Committee  
c/o Nicole Burnside  
Department of Neurology  
Miller School of Medicine University of Miami  
1120 NW 14 Street, Miami, Florida 33136 CRB/1309 (C215)  
or  
nburnside@med.miami.edu

Also available at www.imngmedjobs.com

### Help us light a new flame

A flame of hope for each child and adult living with a seizure disorder. A new light to guide us to a cure for epilepsy and a better quality of life for everyone affected by seizures.

Your gift today helps us make a difference.



EPILEPSY FOUNDATION

4351 GARDEN CITY DRIVE  
LANDOVER, MD 20785  
1-800-EFA-1000  
www.efa.org

(Formerly the Epilepsy Foundation of America)

**NEED HELP?**  
**GRAB THE LINE**  
It's toll-free.



1-800-572-1717

**MDA** Muscular Dystrophy Association  
www.mdausa.org

CD