

# President's Budget Supports Local IT Networks

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WASHINGTON — President Bush's 2006 budget request includes several initiatives to get providers to adopt standards-based, interoperable electronic health records systems.

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) is currently directing \$14 million of this year's budget to jumpstart regional collaborations that would as-

sist health care providers in employing these types of systems. To continue these activities outside of AHRQ in 2006, the budget proposal includes a new \$75 million account in the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology. Although primary care groups have shown a great deal of interest in a national information technology (IT) health care network, language in the budget isn't likely to affect the individual physician's office—at least not directly,

Robert Tennant, senior policy advisor for the Medical Group Management Association (MGMA), said in an interview.

"This will be targeted to the local health information networks that David J. Brailer [the federal coordinator for health IT] has been promoting. That's very different from promoting use in an individual practice," Mr. Tennant said at the annual conference of the National Academy of Social Insurance.

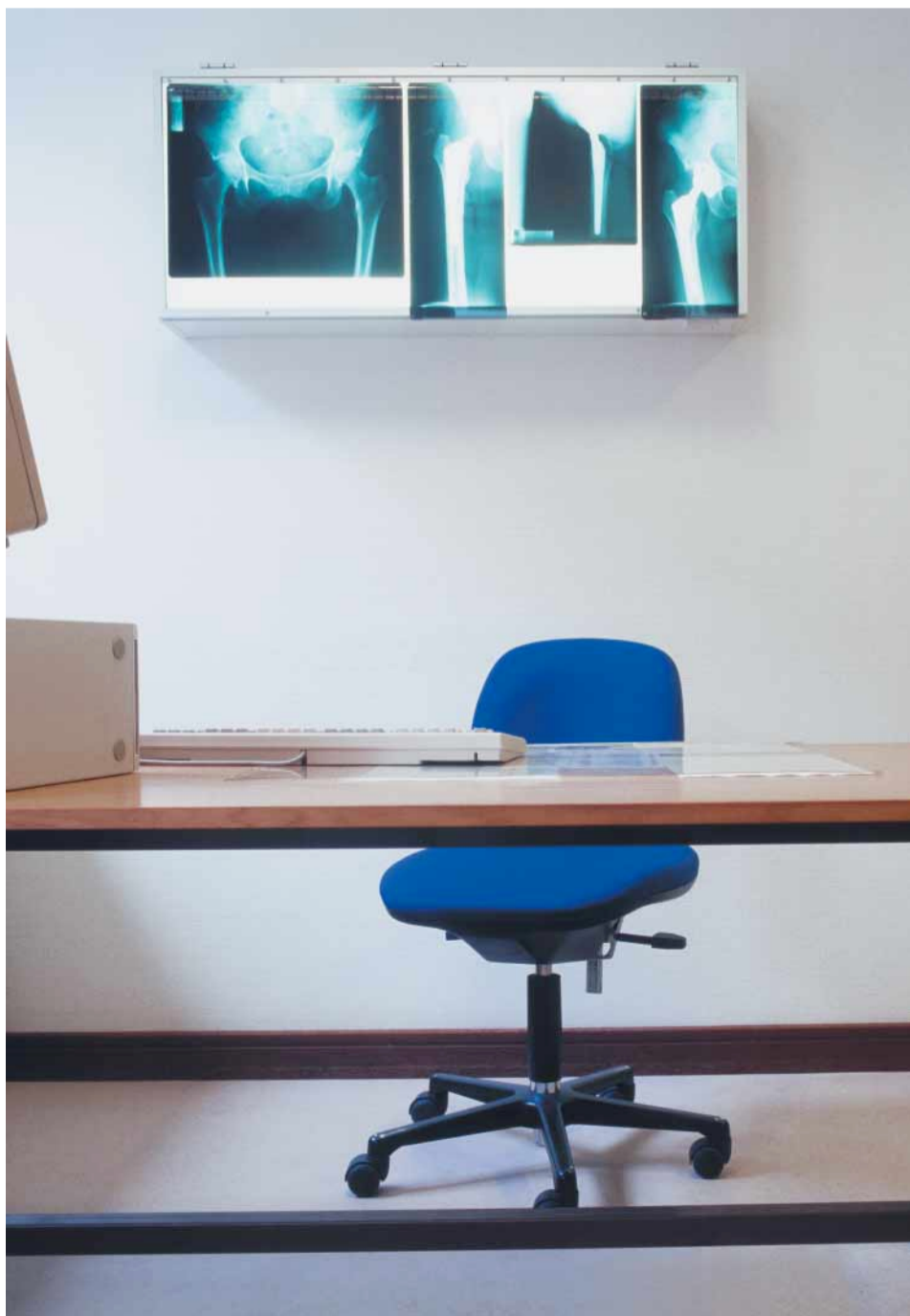
The hope is these initiatives will produce

a network to enhance patient care and encourage practices to spend the money on infrastructures that would link them to this type of network, Mr. Tennant said.

The fact that Dr. Brailer's office is receiving funding at all means that this issue is on the president's radar screen, "considering that appropriations had eliminated funding for the program in 2005," Bob Doherty, senior vice president for governmental affairs and public policy with the American College of Physicians, said. ■

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