

Tech coalition to provide free e-prescribing

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WASHINGTON – A new coalition of technology companies and healthcare payers has initiated a project to provide free electronic prescribing to every physician in the U.S. The \$100 million venture relies on contributions from major IT firms such as Microsoft, Cisco Systems Corp., and Dell, among others.

Termed the National E-Prescribing Patient Safety Initiative (NEPSI), the project will be led by clinical information technology provider Allscripts. The NEPSI program intends to provide physicians free access to a web-based e-prescribing software program called eRx NOW. The Allscripts-designed software requires no download and no new hardware.

“Less than one in five of my physician colleagues are using e-prescribing technology,” said Nancy W. Dickey, MD, president of the Health Science Center at the Texas A&M University System, during a Tuesday press conference in the nation’s capital. “Medication errors and adverse drug events could be virtually eliminated with this technology, which could save the healthcare system \$27 billion.”

Dickey said that the e-prescribing software provided by NEPSI would not only be free, but was safe, secure, and easy to operate. She estimated that an average medical practice would need only 15-30 minutes to train its providers how to use eRx NOW.

According to Glen Tullman, CEO of Allscripts, e-prescribing technology is the first step in a process that will move non-wired physician offices toward adoption of electronic health records. He said that while improving patient health was the primary motivating factor behind the initiative, participating companies viewed their contribution “as a great investment in our future.” “We hope this encourages adoption of EHRs, and as we are a leading provider of EHRs, we think that moving toward a completely electronic health care system will be a good long-term investment [for Allscripts],” Tullman acknowledged.

An important aspect of NEPSI is the participation of healthcare payers Aetna and Wellpoint. The two payers will provide a host of incentives encouraging physicians to adopt e-prescribing technology. Tullman said because start-up costs will be eliminated in the NEPSI initiative, those incentives could be “brought together and have real meaning.”

Tullman also pointed out that the NEPSI project did not intend to supersede state-level e-prescribing initiatives already planned or ongoing. He said that NEPSI would “build upon” already existing programs – sponsored by governments, organizations, or other vendors – and supplement them. “It doesn’t matter whose [e-prescribing] software you use,” he said. “It’s about getting doctors to use the software.”

Regional supporters of NEPSI will provide the eRx NOW software to physicians through an application service provider (ASP) relationship. These supporters include Brown & Toland Medical Group of San Francisco, George Washington University Medical Faculty Associates of Washington, DC, and the LSU Health Network, based in New Orleans.

Mark McClellan, former administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, told press conference attendees that 2007 would be the “year of action on e-prescribing.”

“NEPSI can be the start of this process,” he said. “Government can’t do this alone. It takes collaborative private sector leadership like we’re seeing here.”