

## **MAG helps Georgia secure Electronic Health Records demo spot**

The Medical Association of Georgia (MAG) was instrumental in the process that will enable some 200 physicians from Georgia to participate in a Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) Electronic Health Record demonstration project, according to MAG's president, Jack M. Chapman Jr., M.D.

The Electronic Health Records (EHR) Community program was detailed by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Sec. Michael Leavitt at a joint news conference with Gov. Sonny Perdue that took place at the State Capitol in Atlanta on June 12, Dr. Chapman said. He also pointed out that MAG member Jim Morrow, M.D., with North Fulton Family Medicine, provided testimonial comments at the June 12 kick-off event.

The project, he said, will provide participants with incentive payments to convert from paper to electronic records systems, adding that the project's goal is to revolutionize the way health care information is managed.

The five-year demonstration is designed to encourage primary care practices with less than 20 physicians and that serve Medicare members to use EHR to improve the quality of patient care, Dr. Chapman explained.

CMS says that the first phase of the demonstration will begin later this year, while the second phase will begin in the spring of 2009; Georgia is included in the second phase.

An article in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* said that total payments may be up to \$58,000 per physician — or \$290,000 per practice — over the five years. Some 1,000 doctors in 11 other states also were chosen for the project, the *AJC* reported.

CMS says that during the first year of the project participating practices will receive payments based on CCHIT-certified EHR functionalities used to manage the care of patients, with higher payment for more sophisticated HIT use (e.g., use of the EHR to facilitate care management activities, sharing of records among providers of care, etc.). It announced that payments will be determined by a practice's scores on an Office Systems Survey (OSS), which will be administered annually to track the level of EHR implementation at the practice level and the specific EHR functions employed by each participating practice to support the delivery of care. Higher scores on the OCC will result in increased payments to participating practices, CMS has said.

After the second operational year of the demonstration, CMS has announced, payments will be made to participants that are using CCHIT-certified EHRs and reporting clinical quality measures. In years three through five, it says payments will be based on actual performance on the clinical quality measures – with an added payment each year based on the degree to which the practice has used the EHR to change and improve the way it operates.

CMS says that half of the program participants will be selected at random, while the other half will be assigned to a control group. (CMS has not yet disclosed the formal application process for the control group.)

It's also worth noting that CMS says that health plans are being asked to provide additional financial incentives for participating physicians.

“The Department of Community Health really demonstrated exemplary leadership in having Georgia included in this important demonstration project,” Dr. Chapman said. “Of course, MAG has been a leader in educating physicians across the state on electronic health records for some time now.”

MAG members should contact MAG Director of Health Policy and Third-Party Payer Advocacy Cam Grayson for a program summary. Additional information is available on the CMS Web site at [www.cms.hhs.gov](http://www.cms.hhs.gov).

**Cutline:**

Health and Human Services Secretary Michael Leavitt held a joint news conference with Gov. Sonny Perdue at the State Capitol in Atlanta on June 12 to announce that Georgia has been selected as one of the 12 of the states that will be participating in the Medicare Health Records Demonstration Project. A number of dignitaries were on hand for the event, including (from left) MAG Executive Director David Cook, Secretary Leavitt, Georgia State Medical Association Immediate Past President Lawrence L. Sanders Jr., M.D., and James R. Morrow Jr., M.D., who is with North Fulton Family Medicine and a MAG member.