

Overview

The Commission on Systemic Interoperability

“Everything is about access. Patients need to message us securely and quickly, and they can. They look at lab results, ask for medication refills, and request referrals. It helps them manage their care better.”

Dr. James Morrow, M.D.

The Rationale

While businesses of all sorts rely on 21st century information technology, the healthcare sector remains mired in a paper-based system of record-keeping. A healthcare information network could save patients time, money, discomfort and, perhaps, their lives. If such a network gave caregivers easy access to information about patients’ conditions, drug sensitivities and medical histories, we could save much of the \$200 billion in estimated annual costs due to injuries caused by medical mistakes, and save many of the thousands of American lives lost to medical errors.ⁱ

For these reasons President Bush outlined a plan to ensure that most Americans have electronic health records **within the next ten years**. The Administration reports that President Bush *“believes that innovations in electronic health records and the secure exchange of medical information will help transform healthcare in America—improving healthcare quality, preventing medical errors, reducing healthcare costs, improving administrative efficiencies, reducing paperwork and increasing access to affordable healthcare.”*ⁱⁱ

The Commission’s Background

Congress recognized that to make electronic medical records a reality, these records would have to be part of a connected health information system—easily shared by the networks of doctors’ offices, clinics, hospitals and other healthcare providers.

Congress created the Commission on Systemic Interoperability as part of the Medicare Modernization Act of 2003, and charged the Commission with developing recommendations, priorities and a timeline for implementing an electronic health information exchange network.

Composed of 11 leaders drawn from the ranks of medicine, insurance, technology and government, the Commission will:

- Develop a case for the value of health IT to consumers;
- Tackle issues deterring collaboration among providers and between providers and consumers; and
- Identify investment opportunities and ways to eliminate barriers to accelerating IT adoption in the U.S. healthcare system.

The Work of the Commission

The Commission will deliver a comprehensive report to Congress on Oct. 25, 2005. The Commission’s report will include:

- Recommendations addressing:
 - The adoption gap – Includes who will pay for the system, cultural issues deterring clinicians from embracing healthcare IT and consumer related concerns.

- Interoperability – Deals with questions about how to make the electronic information available to different systems. This includes issues such as technology standards and competitive issues between providers.
- Networking – Involves ensuring secure information exchange, consumer control and policy questions about public health, emergency response and national security issues.
- Patient and physician stories from across the country;
- A list of existing efforts connecting the country; and
- A resource of all previous recommendations for interoperability.

Commission members appointed by the President and the U.S. Congress include:

- Chairman: Scott Wallace, J.D., M.B.A.
President & CEO
The National Alliance for Health Information Technology
- Simon Cohn, M.D., M.P.H., F.A.C.E.P., F.A.C.M.I.
Associate Executive Director, Health Information Policy
Kaiser Permanente
- Don E. Detmer, M.D., M.A., F.A.C.M.I.
President & CEO
American Medical Informatics Association
- Vicky Gregg, R.N.
President and CEO
BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee
- C. Martin Harris, M.D., M.B.A.
CIO
Cleveland Clinic Foundation
- Gary Mecklenburg, M.B.A.
President & CEO
Northwestern Memorial Healthcare
- Herbert Pardes, M.D.
President & CEO
New York Presbyterian Hospital
- Thomas M. Priselac, M.P.H.
President & CEO
Cedars-Sinai Health System
- Ivan Seidenberg, M.B.A.
Chairman & CEO
Verizon Communication
- Fredrick W. Slunecka, F.A.C.H.E.
Regional President
Avera McKennan

- William W. Stead, M.D.
Director, Informatics Center
Associate Vice-Chancellor for Health Affairs
Professor, Medicine and Biomedical Informatics
Vanderbilt University Medical Center
- Designated Federal Official: Donald A.B. Lindberg, M.D.
Director
National Library of Medicine
- Director: Dana Haza
National Library of Medicine

ⁱ National Patient Safety Foundation, Dr., Lucian Leape, M.D., Harvard School of Public Health, 10/9/1997.

ⁱⁱ "Promoting Innovation and Competitiveness: President Bush's Technology Agenda," The White House, www.whitehouse.gov.