



**Support National Standards to
Promote/Adopt/Improve Interoperability
In Electronic Health Records**

**A Work Product of the
Electronic Health Record Vendors Association (EHRVA)
and the Healthcare Information and
Management Systems Society (HIMSS)**

©2008 by the Electronic Health Record Vendors Association (EHRVA) and the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS)

The members of the Electronic Health Record Vendors Association (EHRVA) are committed to achieving the benefits that are inherent in the use of healthcare information technology (IT) and electronic health record systems (EHRs). We believe EHRs hold the potential to improve the quality and safety of patient care while increasing the efficiency and productivity of the healthcare system as a whole.

The realization of this potential will depend on widespread adoption of EHRs and the implementation of a common foundation of standards for interoperability so that different systems can accurately and securely exchange patient data. In order to ensure the continued momentum on achieving the benefits of healthcare IT, the EHRVA calls on members of the U.S. Congress and State Legislatures to move forward with legislative action that:

- Supports and incentivizes the use of IT in healthcare delivery and related business work flows.
- Provides essential funding for federal (and state) healthcare IT-related initiatives, including the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) and the Health Information Technology Standards Panel (HITSP).¹
- Facilitates the introduction of appropriate standards for interoperability as promulgated by HITSP, and the adoption of the interoperability standards by the Certification Commission for Health Information Technology (CCHIT).

Background

A computer system is said to be interoperable when it can exchange data with, and use data from, other systems. Interoperability in healthcare IT refers to the ability of healthcare IT systems to work together within and across organizational boundaries in order to enable the efficient and effective delivery of healthcare data. Having data in a digital format does not automatically confer interoperability. Interoperability depends on different IT systems having a common technical foundation for exchanging information. This includes specifying the rules that define how information is to be sent back and forth as well as rules for how data is described so that it can be processed correctly. However, achieving interoperability also entails policy (e.g., privacy/security compliance, as detailed in the EHRVA complimentary white paper on this topic) and business issues that need to be coordinated and adhered to between organizations to make exchanging health data commercially acceptable and legally compliant.

There are a number of challenging issues around interoperability and EHR adoption:

- Interoperability protocols are a potentially rate-limiting step for EHR adoption.
- Unless interoperability standards are widely accepted and built into products, it may slow EHR adoption among providers and the development of a nationwide healthcare IT network.
- Fully deployed EHR systems will require interaction with other healthcare IT systems, such as lab services, picture archiving and communication systems (PACS), transcription or practice management, the nature of which adds further technical

¹1. In 2005, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) awarded a contract targeting the creation of processes to harmonize standards to advance the vision for widespread adoption of interoperable electronic health records (EHRs) within 10 years. HITSP is administered by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) in cooperation with strategic partners including the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS), the Advanced Technology Institute (ATI), and Booz Allen Hamilton.

complexity with data elements having to be computer-only readable (coded) or human and computer readable depending on use.

- Keeping records updated in a two-way fashion between independent/competing systems as a patient moves through his or her care pathway again poses challenges for interoperability. Given the complexity of describing clinical information, there is no one standard that can solve all the challenges of interoperability.

The benefits of appropriate sharing of health information among patients, physicians and other authorized participants in the healthcare delivery value chain are nearly universally understood and desired. Standards governing interoperability are being promulgated today and can be included in certified technology solutions given adequate time and the opportunity for the information technology community to dialog affectively with HITSP, as this body refines the appropriate standards to include in ensuing CCHIT certification platforms. Members of Congress should support EHR adoption and implementation by voting in legislation that incentivizes the development and adoption of certified healthcare IT products that demonstrate the recognized interoperability standards. Incentives to healthcare providers should enable them to invest in upgrading healthcare IT infrastructure and the accompanying EHRs for their patients to move toward timely, seamless continuity of care, improved health outcomes, fewer medical errors and duplicated or unnecessary procedures and the costs associated with them.

The EHRVA completely supports the need for full interoperability of all healthcare IT solutions, thus enabling further adoption of healthcare IT. We ask for your support and leadership in moving forward on the requests made in this paper with the goal of further adoption of healthcare IT resulting in improved efficiency and quality of care across our healthcare system.