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CMS Announces Final Rules to Support 'Meaningful Use' of Electronic Health Records

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) and the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) announced two final regulations implementing requirements for meaningful use of electronic health records. The first rule issued by CMS defines the minimum requirements providers must meet through their use of certified electronic health record (EHR) technology in order to qualify for payment under the program. The second rule, issued by ONC, specifies the standards and certification criteria of EHR technology, so eligible professionals and hospitals can ensure that their systems are capable of meeting the requirements for payment through this initiative. CMS elected to make some key changes in their final rule, the most significant of which was the decision to divide the requirements for "meaningful use" into two groups, one "core" group of required objectives that must be met and a second "menu set" from which providers can choose five procedures to defer until 2011-2012.

ONC estimates that they will have approved organizations that will certify EHR systems as qualifying for meaningful use by the end of this summer and that certified EHR systems will be available later in the fall. Likewise, CMS will set up a program for hospitals and eligible professionals to begin registering online beginning in January 2011. Providers will be able to demonstrate they have achieved meaningful use objectives in compliance with these regulations by submitting a provider attestation in 2011. CMS expects incentive payments to begin nine months after the publication of this final rule.

For more information, please visit the CMS Web site at <http://www.cms.gov/EHRIncentivePrograms>.