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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HHS Announces Final Rules to Support Meaningful Use of Electronic Health Records

tnREC designated to advise Tennessee healthcare providers on making EHRs a reality

[NASHVILLE] – U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius announced Tuesday final rules to help improve Americans' health, increase safety and reduce health care costs through expanded use of electronic health records (EHR).

tnREC, a division of QSource, is one of 60 Regional Extension Centers around the country, designated to offer health care providers a local resource for technical assistance, guidance, and information on best practices to support and accelerate health care provider efforts to become meaningful users of EHR.

“For years, health policy leaders on both sides of the aisle have urged adoption of electronic health records throughout our health care system to improve quality of care and ultimately lower costs,” Secretary Sebelius said. “With the leadership of the President and the Congress, we are making that goal a reality.”

Established under the HITECH Act Under the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) Act of 2009, eligible health care professionals and hospitals can qualify for Medicare and Medicaid incentive payments when they adopt certified EHR technology and use it to achieve specified objectives. One of the two regulations announced today defines the “meaningful use” objectives that providers must meet to qualify for the bonus payments, and the other regulation identifies the technical capabilities required for certified EHR technology.

With “meaningful use” definitions in place, tnREC will be working with primary care providers and their practices to ensure that the EHR system they acquire will support achievement of “meaningful use” objectives. With Tuesday’s announcement, a concentrated five-year national initiative to adopt and use electronic records in health care can begin.

“tnREC provides hands-on, field support for all healthcare providers to advance the rapid adoption and use of health IT,” said Jennifer McAnally, tnREC Director. “We fill the role of trusted advisor in understanding the unique challenges facing today’s healthcare provider, offering a combination of national insight and local expertise.”

Two companion final rules were announced today. One regulation, issued by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), defines the minimum requirements that providers must meet through their use of certified EHR technology in order to qualify for the payments. The other rule, issued by the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC), identifies the standards and certification criteria for the certification of EHR technology, so eligible professionals and hospitals may be assured that the systems they adopt are capable of performing the required functions.

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“These final rules provide the necessary direction on how to proceed with the adoption of EHRs and will guide our assistance to providers across the state,” McAnally said.

The CMS rule announced Tuesday makes final a proposed rule issued on Jan, 13, 2010. The final rule includes modifications that address stakeholder concerns while retaining the intent and structure of the incentive programs. In particular, while the proposed rule called on eligible professionals to meet 25 requirements (23 for hospitals) in their use of EHRs, the final rules divides the requirements into a “core” group of requirements that must be met, plus an additional “menu” of procedures from which providers may choose. This “two track” approach ensures that the most basic elements of meaningful EHR use will be met by all providers qualifying for incentive payments, while at the same time allowing latitude in other areas to reflect providers’ needs and their individual path to full EHR use.

“Health care is finally making the technology advances that other sectors of our economy began to undertake years ago,” Dr. Blumenthal said. “These changes will be challenging for clinicians and hospitals, but the time has come to act. Adoption and meaningful use of EHRs will help providers deliver better and more effective care, and the benefits for patients and providers alike will grow rapidly over time.”

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About tnREC

tnREC, a division of QSource, is Tennessee's regional extension center for health information technology (HIT). We work with providers across the state to ensure they meet government requirements for HIT implementation and payment. We provide robust local technical assistance in implementing electronic health records (EHRs), improving healthcare quality and achieving meaningful use of HIT.

For more information on tnREC, go to tnREC.org.

About QSource

QSource is an independent, not-for-profit healthcare consulting firm holding multiple state and national government contracts with offices in Memphis, Nashville, Knoxville and Little Rock, Ark. Under a contract with Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHS), QSource provides healthcare quality improvement collaborative opportunities for the providers, practitioners and managed care plans that care for more than 900,000 Medicare beneficiaries in Tennessee.

For more information on QSource, go to qsource.org.