

If you have been to the hospital recently or have read my articles, you know Thayer County Health Services (TCHS) will be upgrading to a new software vendor for their electronic health information (EHR) system on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011. This new system will meet the eligibility requirements set forth in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 which outline the Medicare and Medicaid Incentive Programs for Critical Access Hospitals (CAH).

Starting in 2011, healthcare professionals, eligible hospitals and CAHs must be using certified EHR technology to qualify for incentive payments from Medicare and Medicaid. Using a certified EHR system means providers and patients can be confident the system is secure, confidential and will work with other systems to share health information. It is also an assurance that the necessary technological capability, functionality, and security are in place to meet the “meaningful use” criteria requirements.

**What is "Meaningful Use"?** Meaningful use is the term used to describe the level in which a healthcare provider is electronic with their EHR. In the future, healthcare providers who are able to demonstrate “Meaningful Use” will receive incentive payments from Medicare and Medicaid to help cover the cost of delivering care. Besides just being a financial benefit, “Meaningful Use” will have a big impact on improving overall patient safety

EHR systems do not achieve these benefits merely by transferring information from paper format into digital format. An EHR system can only deliver their benefits when the information it contains are standardized and structured in a uniformed way. Just as ATMs depend on uniformly structured data formats, the “meaningful use” approach will also require a standardization of EHR systems.

Similarly, an EHR system cannot achieve its full potential if providers don’t use the functions designed to deliver the most benefit – for example, exchanging information, and entering orders through the computer so that the “decision support” functions and other automated processes are activated. Therefore, the “meaningful use” approach requires healthcare providers to meet specified objectives in the use of their EHR system to qualify for the incentive payments. For example: basic information needs to be entered into the qualified EHR so that it exists in the “structured” format; information exchange needs to begin; security checks need to be routinely made; and medical orders need to be made using Computerized Provider Order Entry (CPOE). These requirements begin at lower levels in the first stage of meaningful use, and are expected to be completely phased in over the next five years. Some of these requirements are “core” needs, but healthcare providers are also given some choice in meeting additional criteria from a “menu set.”

Once the upgrade to the new certified EHR software is complete, THCS will be able to achieve “meaningful use”. However, the most important outcome from this upgrade will be a safer environment for our patients to receive their healthcare. It will also mean TCHS will qualify for reimbursements payments from Medicare and Medicaid beginning as early as 2011. These incentive payments will help the bottom line at TCHS and allow us to continue to make improvements to our facilities, services and purchase new medical equipment.

The staff at TCHS has been working hard preparing for this transition. As we enter this final week before the conversion, we ask that you have patience when you come in for your next appointment as we make these necessary changes to better serve you.

Source: [www.cms.gov](http://www.cms.gov)