



HEALTH INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

The Issue

CHRISTUS Health believes that effective and comprehensive health care reform cannot be achieved without the adoption of Health Information Technology. It represents the single most important component for improving health care in the United States because of its promise to improve overall quality and access. Efficiency and accuracy in the care delivery system can be maximized by the following aspects of full adoption of health information technology:

- Electronic records allow for portability and easy access, therefore improving the overall quality of patient care;
- Information may be shared across multiple providers in real time;
- Electronic records contribute to a true team concept in patient care by eliminating physical barriers to the sharing of crucial information among care partners;
- Patient care transcends the traditional care setting by becoming universal; therefore greatly improving the level of access to care.

Meaningful health care reform in the United States faces a variety of unique challenges, including how to provide universal care while simultaneously preserving the integrity of the quality of care. The use of health information technology, with its ability to promote information exchange and improve overall communications among providers, is necessary for effective and fundamental change in health care in this country.

Nearly every state in the union has engaged health care stakeholders and coalitions from across the care and business sectors to examine this important issue. It is vitally important to determine how best to adapt the available health information technology to support the advancement of quality care in a political environment that seems to now be promoting some form of universal health care. Yet, new fiscal challenges threaten in most areas of the nation, where funding for health care is an ongoing legislative and budgetary issue of concern.

- At least 28 states have established initiatives to develop methods and policies for the widespread adoption of health information technology;
- Approximately 50 percent of states have an executive order or legislative mandate to stimulate the broader use of health information technology;

- Many states are offering grant funding to support the use of health information technology;
- The issue gained national attention in the aftermath of two devastating hurricanes that struck the Gulf Coast in 2005, due to the resulting impact on health care infrastructure in the region and the limitations on the care delivery system.

The CHRISTUS Health Position: The widespread adoption of health information technology and standardization of clinical language will improve the level of quality, access, and cost of care, as well as protect our ability to secure appropriate treatment for patients in situations where physical records are either unavailable or have been destroyed. Indeed, the ability to respond quickly and effectively to the needs of our patients is at the fundamental core of our mission, and one of the highest priorities of CHRISTUS Health.

While CHRISTUS Health recognizes that current policy initiatives have fallen short of this crucial goal, we are pledged to work to see this key component of overall health care policy become a reality. We support meaningful policy initiatives that will empower individuals to be more knowledgeable about their own health care and thus enable the patient to be a true partner in the care process – as well giving providers efficient and easy access to portable medical records. The positive impact of such meaningful policy would apply to:

- Reimbursement for electronic medical records through health plans and insurers;
- Standards for interoperability and exchange of information;
- Reimbursements for electronic physician visits and other consultations;
- Community based efforts to more closely coordinate care;
- Funding of pilot programs to demonstrate the most effective models;
- Funding of cooperative efforts among health care partners to explore technology's best applications;
- The creation of community models that will enable patients to access their personal records;
- Resolution of state-level licensure issues which restrict the delivery of health care across geographic borders.

The use of health information technology holds significant promise for the future of health care, with its ability to promote information exchange and improve overall quality of care and access to care. Therefore it is critical that the United States address meaningful policy regarding this issue in order to secure effective and fundamental change in health care in this country.