

## Tsang: 'Attest early and get the help available'

WARWICK, R.I.—“Meaningful use is a vehicle to practice transformation,” said Thomas Tsang, MD, MPH, medical director of meaningful use and quality at the Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT (ONC). He also noted that 17 vendors represent 87 percent of providers live on EHRs, during his keynote address, titled “Beyond Meaningful Use,” at Rhode Island Quality Institute’s second annual Health IT Expo on May 18.

Meaningful use broadly aligns with future goals and programs coming out in the private and public sector, added Tsang. “My message is to attest early and get the help available.”

Tsang shared a personal anecdote during his days as the CMO at the Charles B. Wang Community Health Center in New York City on the adoption of an EHR. “It wasn’t an easy journey during the go-live period,” he admitted. With 75 providers at the organization whose salaries depended on productivity and who needed 4,000 visits a year, it was tough when their productivity dropped about 25 percent in the first month. However, the productivity drop lessened to about 10 percent in the second month. “In the third month, [productivity was off] about 5 percent. But at the fourth month, they all caught up,” he said.

A year later, the providers vowed they would never go back to a paper-based chart, even though the go-live period was patchy. “I lived through it before the incentives so my two cents is to engage with the regional extension centers and [discover] what’s available,” Tsang advised.

Currently, there are 68,870 primary care providers enrolled in the Medicare EHR Incentive Program, he noted. “Our target was 100,000 primary care providers, and I think the RECs, health information exchanges and Beacon folks have done an amazing job bringing primary care providers into the program just the first year alone.”

“We’re targeting providers in small practices and we have over 350 products that are certified in the program,” Tsang added. ONC also has advanced meaningful use vanguard groups identified in 35 states; many of which are going to attest and get their money this year, he said.

Thirty-eight percent of the primary care providers are in small practices; 25 percent in community health centers, 10 percent in practice consortia and 10 percent in medically underserved settings, according to Tsang.

There are currently 15,045 primary care providers live with an EHR, he stated. “During the first year [of the program], you don’t have to submit data; just attest to it,” he added.

The healthcare system in America is costing the country \$2.5 trillion annually; one-third of that is administrative waste, such as ordering five scans on one patient for a tension headache, Tsang stated.

“We truly believe that the meaningful use objectives are extremely relevant ... to the practice of medicine and we truly believe that they are going to decrease premature deaths.” Tsang cited that the ONC is asking caregivers to look at cardiovascular diseases and update medication lists so that coordination of care is achieved thus reducing drug-drug or drug-allergy complications, for example.

Meaningful use objectives will augment initiatives such as the patient-centered medical home to have focus on patient-centered care, Tsang predicted. The objectives include patient education requirements, after-visit summaries, reminders to patients and patients receiving copies of their medical records as well as online access. “Liquidity of data is going to be relevant and critical in the next decade,” opined Tsang.

Twenty-two of the 65 proposed accountable care organization measures are part of meaning use, Tsang pointed out. “There are 32 patient-centered medical homes across the country. You’re going to see these type of programs popping up all over the country.

“In order to do the patient registries, in order to do the analytics to provide this coordinated care, you’re going to need an EHR,” Tsang concluded. “It’s more than just meaningful use. You have multiple forces in the healthcare industry and the delivery system all coming at the same time hitting all of us critically at this one pivotal moment in history where it’s time for you to jump on the bandwagon.”

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