

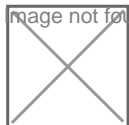
HHS secretary says agency needs physician input

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Staff News Writer



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With physicians shouldering a tsunami of regulatory burdens, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Sylvia Mathews Burwell Tuesday told doctors that the agency wants to help restore the “joy of medicine.”

Speaking at the AMA National Advocacy Conference, Burwell (pictured left) pointed to ways HHS is working to build a better, smarter health care system—which means listening to physicians.

“We know you have some concerns when it comes to electronic health records (EHR), and we know that you often find them to be clunky, and we want to work with you to improve that usability so they can become a valuable tool,” Burwell said.

“We have heard you when you said that the meaningful use program was too much, too fast,” she said. “This is why we recently announced plans to make meaningful use more straightforward, more flexible and focused on outcomes and interoperability.”

Burwell said the agency is aligning its quality measure reporting programs and wants to work with physicians on solutions to make their lives easier.

She also touched on the sustainable growth rate (SGR) formula, a timely topic given that the current Medicare payment patch will expire on March 31.

"We've heard your concerns [about SGR] and we share them," Burwell said. "And so, in the president's FY 2016 budget proposal, the president is asking for the fix... we're hopeful that that's something that can be done in full, and that's why we put [forward] the proposal, not a temporary fix, but the permanent fix that I think we all know is what we need."

Finally, Burwell said HHS is focused on improving the way care is delivered and the way information is distributed. She mentioned the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid's Transforming Clinical Practice Initiative, announced in October. The initiative will award \$800 million for the creation of evidence-based, peer-led collaboratives and practice transformation networks to support physicians in providing high-quality care.

"This effort will support an estimated 150,000 physicians and other clinicians as they transform their practices using peer-to-peer experiences and best practices as a guide," Burwell said.

The AMA continues to work with HHS to address the regulatory burdens physicians face, including meaningful use and the usability of EHRs.

"I am committed to making sure [the HHS does] a good job at listening and at communicating, because that's what a relationship is all about," Burwell said.