Delegates ask for suspension of meaningful use penalties

NOV 10, 2014

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At the 2014 AMA Interim Meeting this week, delegates renewed their request that the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services suspend penalties for failure to meet meaningful use criteria.

The new policy comes on the heels of the recent release of new attestation numbers showing only 2 percent of physicians have demonstrated Stage 2 meaningful use so far this year. In response to the new figure, the AMA joined with other health care leaders to urge policymakers to take immediate action to fix the meaningful use program by adding more flexibility and shortening the reporting period to help physicians avoid penalties.

“The whole point of the meaningful use incentive program was to allow for the secure exchange of information across settings and providers, and right now that type of sharing and coordination is not happening on a wide scale for reasons outside physicians’ control,” AMA President-Elect Steven J. Stack, MD, said. “Physicians want to improve the quality of care and usable, interoperable EHRs are a pathway to achieving that goal.”

In addition to calling for EHRs to be more interoperable, physicians also are recommending that policymakers ease regulations to allow for EHRs to become more usable.

An AMA-RAND study released in 2013 cited EHRs as a major source of dissatisfaction for physicians. The report found that physicians want to embrace technology, but they’re frustrated that regulatory requirements are forcing them to do clerical work and distracting them from paying close attention to their patients. Physicians also raised concerns about interoperability in the study, saying that the inability of EHRs to “talk” to each other prevents the transmission of patient medical information when it’s needed.
The AMA continues to work aggressively to improve medical practice, including the usability of EHRs, so physicians can focus on their patients. By working toward delivery systems that support physician success, the AMA strives to enhance patient care, make delivery more efficient, and reduce unnecessary costs or burdens through its Professional Satisfaction and Practice Sustainability initiative.

As part of that effort, the AMA provided the Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT (ONC) and CMS with a blueprint for improving the meaningful use program as well as a framework outlining eight priorities for more usable EHRs. Physicians want to use high-performing, interoperable technology in a way they see best fit to help them care for their patients. Modifying the meaningful use program will help to meet these goals.