

**MOA MEMBERS**  
**FROM SUE A. WEINGARTNER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**  
**FEBRUARY 10, 2010**

**ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORDS (EHR)**

<http://www.aoa.org/HIT.xml>

The federal government, through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, includes incentive payments for individual physicians through Medicare or Medicaid (but not both) to use electronic health records. Optometrists are eligible in either program **but must meet specific criteria**—provisions known as the HITECH Act.

The AOA is working to provide information, resources and assistance to the states for member education in preparing for the advent of electronic health records. We encourage you to keep up to date as information is received on this issue by reading the AOA News, checking the AOA website link: <http://www.aoa.org/HIT.xml> and reading the member memos from the MOA as updates will be provided regularly. The MOA education committee is working on providing educational programming that will help you to better understand, prepare and make good decisions on systems.

The AOA held a WebEx on EHRs Monday evening. Affiliate board members and ED's were invited to attend. Good information was presented by Gary Robbins, Kansas ED, Rodney Peele, Esq., AOA assistant director-regulatory policy and outreach—advocacy group; Dr. Philip Gross, chair, AOA health information technology and telemedicine committee; and Dr. Mary Beth Rhomberg, AOA associate direction, sections—clinical practice and advancement group. If you would like to listen to the presentations (1 hour 6 minutes), click on the following link to play it:

<https://aoaevents.webex.com/aoaevents/lsr.php?AT=pb&SP=EC&rID=1981372&rKey=3ed10dbc9fa9f196>

If you would like a copy of the power point slides from the presentation, let me know and I will send to you.

**Medicare:** It is important that practices start preparing NOW for the January 2, 2011 initial deadline. Federal money will be available to help practices (up to \$48,400 if you start in 2011 and 2012; up to \$42,900 if you start in 2013; up to \$26,400 if you start in 2014; -0- if you start after 2012; penalties are possible in 2015 and beyond. The amount of money available to individual practices will depend upon your location and overall Medicare reimbursement.

**Medicaid:** How much money can doctors get? \$21,250 in year one (as soon as 2010); \$8,500 for the following five years; \$63,750 total over six years. Thirty (30) percent of patients must be Medicaid. Payment is not dependent on location or amount of Medicaid reimbursement.

**Ten things optometrists should know about EHRs:**

1. EHRs are not mandatory. The AOA encourages doctors to use EHRs and provides information at <http://www.aoa.org/HIT.xml> but does not recommend specific products.

2. Provisions within ARRA give significant incentives in Medicare and Medicaid for doctors to use EHRs. Last winter, the AOA successfully convinced Congress to include ODs in these programs.

3. Doctors who begin using EHRs by 2011 or 2012 can receive the maximum reward, up to \$44,000 over five years through the Medicare program (75 percent of Medicare-allowed charges up to a capped amount for each year). But if you wait until 2015 to start, there are no incentives.

4. Doctors must use the EHRs in a "meaningful" way. Merely purchasing/installing software will not be enough. Doctors will have to demonstrate that they are using the EHR as a tool to improve patient care.

5. Beginning in 2011, Medicare physicians who implement and report "meaningful use" of EHRs will be eligible for an initial incentive payment up to \$18,000. ODs who practice in health professional shortage areas may qualify for an additional 10 percent incentive through Medicare.

6. Doctors who do not start using EHRs by 2015 may face penalties in Medicare. However, the HHS has the authority to make exceptions to the Medicare penalties on a case-by-case basis for physicians who demonstrate significant hardship (e.g., a physician who practices in rural areas without adequate Internet access).

7. The EHRs must be "certified." The AOA has worked alongside ophthalmology organizations to secure a certification track for eye care EHRs, which was previously unavailable for vendors of eye care EHRs. The AOA believes the federal government will provide a separate path to certification specifically for ARRA so that all EHRs regardless of specialty or designer/ creator can be certified for purposes of the stimulus.

8. In Medicaid, the payments begin as high as \$25,000 for the first year and up to \$10,000 each of the following five years. But the Medicaid program has additional hurdles and is only practical for practices with a high volume of Medicaid patients.

9. One doctor can't get available bonuses from both Medicare and Medicaid.

10. Doctors should begin to make plans to implement EHRs in practice before the end of 2010. The AOA will have more guidance about certification and meaningful use in the months ahead.

AOA members with questions or concerns should contact Rodney Peele of the AOA Washington office at 800-365-2219, ext. 1348 or [rpeele@aoa.org](mailto:rpeele@aoa.org).