

The Big \$44,000 Question

By Dr. David Bohn, DC

I think I could retire from practice if I had \$1000 for every time I have been asked if QuickSOAP Notes is certified and meets the "Medicare Stimulus Package" requirements. There is a tremendous amount of misinformation and even more misunderstanding about the consequences of acquiring a certified computer system.

There is no way I can cover all the aspects in this short article but I do want to point out some of the big things a doctor should consider while shopping for an electronic note system.

To begin, if you do very little Medicare billing and have few patients with Medicare, why are you concerned about this at all? There is no way it can be profitable for you. The costs of maintaining a certified system will far outweigh any financial gain. You will be committed to long term use and compliance of meeting the required meaningful use documentation. Once you receive any money from the government you must continue to document and show that you are meeting the "Meaningful Use" requirements for 10 years or you are subject to reimbursing any compensation received under the stimulus program.

This means that you could be completely tied to a software company and any required yearly maintenance costs for un-for-told years to come. Is this really what you want? What many doctors do not understand is that if you apply for reimbursement under the stimulus program you have to meet "Meaningful Use" for ALL PATIENTS, even your cash patients, not just Medicare patients.

If you take the time to read all the requirements to meet meaningful use, there are many, you will begin to see that you currently do very few. To be certified, an EHR must enable the office to record and modify demographic data including preferred language, insurance type, gender, race, ethnicity and date of birth. In addition, vital signs such as height, weight, blood pressure, temperature and pulse must be able to be recorded and modified. The system must automatically calculate and display the body mass index based on the patient's height and weight. An interesting addition to the requirements is the fact that the EHR must record smoking status for patients 13 years or older. It must be able to indicate whether the patient is a current smoker, former smoker or someone who has never smoked. This is just a very short list of the requirements.

Be aware, you do not automatically get the \$44,000 for buying a certified software system; you must show meaningful use of the software to be eligible for the stimulus payments. Are you willing to change the way you practice for just 3% of your Medicare reimbursement?

For some of you, becoming certified may be the smart thing to do. I am suggesting that before you commit to changing the way you practice check out all of your options. Be sure that you are going to benefit from your endeavors and that you're willing to show meaningful use for 10 years.

There also seems to be quite a bit of confusion as to whether or not you will be able to bill Medicare if you do not have a certified software system. Having certified software has nothing to do with your ability to bill Medicare. You will be able to bill Medicare using paper HCFA forms if you so choose. In 2015, you will be subject to a penalty of 1% if you choose to submit billing to Medicare without using a certified software system. In 2017, this penalty reaches a maximum 3% for doctors who are not using a certified system. I personally cannot see how you will ever reap a financial reward after factoring in the cost of supporting a certified system.

Many chiropractic software companies have done quite well from this \$44,000 stimulus promise. You will see many sites talking about their certified software and how easy it will be to implement it into your practice. Be careful of the wording in these ads because

“implementing software” can be a very involved and daunting task. If you aren't absolutely in love with the software you're considering, do not buy. Please do not buy software simply because it is certified and you are anticipating getting a big payout from the government. Implementing and installing software can be a huge undertaking and can drastically change the way you practice. Some software is very difficult to learn when you consider that you have to use it in a way that demonstrates "meaningful use" it could very easily cost you more that you could ever gain.

Dr David Bohn is the CEO of www.chiroconceptions.com and the developer of QuickSOAP Notes and XRPpro Biomechanical Analysis Software. He has been in the continuous practice of chiropractic since December 1988.