

## E-Prescribing Measure Will Cut Costs

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A Federal measure that encourages using electronic systems for prescriptions will help deliver safer and more efficient care to patients while also cutting costs, posits Vincent Duffy, a Purdue University professor of industrial engineering and researcher at Discovery Park's Regenstrief Center for Healthcare Engineering, West Lafayette, Ind. This pilot project, which began last month and runs through 2013, awards doctors additional money from Medicare if they use electronic prescribing systems, known as e-prescribing. Medicare will give doctors a two percent bonus on top of their fee for e-prescribing in 2009 and 2010. In 2011 and 2012, the bonus will drop to one percent and, in 2013, it will dip again to 0.5%.

This bonus program encouraging e-prescribing will make the system more efficient, streamline the prescription process, and help reduce medical errors," predicts Duffy. "When you consider 3,000,000,000 prescriptions are written annually, this measure could have a significant impact on U.S. health care."

According to the Institute of Medicine, Washington, D.C., 1,500,000 Americans are injured annually by drug errors, and analysis say approximately 7,000 U.S. deaths occur each year because of such mistakes. Another study found that, each year, pharmacists make more than 150,000,000 phone calls to doctors to clarify what was written on the paper prescription.

"Some of these errors can be traced to handwriting illegibility, wrong dosing, missed drug interactions, or drug-allergy reaction," Duffy points out. This area constitutes one of the largest paper-based processes in the United States. The evidence is clear that the writing of prescriptions can be streamlined and made more efficient by using an e-prescribing system."

The Federal law that set up the Medicare prescription drug program in 2006 mandated that participating pharmacies be able to accept e-prescriptions. E-prescribing simply is an electronic way to generate prescriptions through an automated data-entry process utilizing special software and a transmission network that links to participating pharmacies. Medicare officials expect to save up to \$156,000,000 over the life of the e-prescribing program in fewer adverse drug events.

"Less than 20% of physicians currently use e-prescribing, even though more than 70% of pharmacies are capable of receiving electronic prescriptions," Duffy indicates.

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