

June 16, 2003

The Honorable Bill Thomas
Chairman
Committee on Ways and Means
United States House of Representatives
1136 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Billy Tauzin
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce
United States House of Representatives
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Thomas and Tauzin:

Members of the eHealth Initiative — a non-profit consortium with more than 140 leading organizations whose mission is to improve the quality, safety and cost-effectiveness of health care through information and emerging technologies — want to commend you for your legislation the “Prescription Drug and Medicare Modernization Act of 2003” which makes available a voluntary prescription drug benefit to all Medicare beneficiaries. Our organization wants to particularly indicate its support for the bill’s establishment of an electronic prescription drug program and attention to information technology standards, coding and payment-- all of which advance patient safety improvements and cost-effective care through the promotion of innovative, interactive, real-time health care delivery enabled by information technology.

Modernizing America’s outdated Medicare program and improving patient care and safety for seniors are continuing challenges our nation must meet. Your bill’s electronic prescription drug program and technology provisions advance these goals by:

- Providing for national, uniform electronic prescription drug standards developed by the Federal Government in consultation with a new advisory task force;
- Requiring advisory task force recommendations on the: (1) range of available computerized prescribing software and hardware and their costs to implement; (2) extent to which such standards and systems reduce medication errors and can be readily implemented by physicians, pharmacies and hospitals; (3) efforts to develop uniform standards and a common

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software platform for the secure electronic communication of medication history, eligibility, benefit and prescription information;(4) efforts to develop and promote universal connectivity and interoperability for the secure electronic exchange of such information; and (5) implementation issues and their impact on computerized prescribing.

- Establishing a new Council for Technology and Innovation and an Executive Coordinator for Technology and Innovation within the Federal Government to coordinate the coverage, coding and payment processes for new technologies and procedures and to coordinate the exchange of information on new technologies between the Federal Government and other entities that make similar decisions;
- Providing for improvements in the recognition of new technologies under the Medicare inpatient hospital Prospective Payment System and for enhanced input from the public and appropriate experts as to whether a new service or technology represents an advance in medical technology that substantially improves beneficiary diagnosis and treatment.

As you know, increasing the proliferation of information technology and creating a more interconnected health care system are powerful ways to enhance health care quality and patient safety while lessening clinical and administrative burden on health care providers. Boosting the dissemination of electronic prescribing tools and improving basic care processes through the greater use of information technology that is interwoven with provider workflow, is vital to a safe, cost-efficient and high-quality health care system. Your legislation achieves these goals.

In closing, we applaud your efforts to bring a prescription drug program to America's seniors and modernize the Medicare program by enhancing patient safety and connectivity as well as standardizing electronically transmitted health care information and better coordinating coverage, coding and payment procedures for new technologies and procedures.

Sincerely,

Janet M. Marchibroda
Chief Executive Officer