

Bridgewater Courier News

Health IT Coalition Is Making A Big Pitch For Legislation

If Passed, It Could Save Homeowners Money

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Health-care costs are increasing and homeowners are being forced by cash-strapped employers to assume a larger share of health insurance costs.

Legislation that will save homeowners and their employers a lot of money on healthcare expenses will soon be considered by Congress.

Representatives of the American Homeowners Grassroots Alliance and other members of the Health IT Now! Coalition will spend Wednesday on Capitol Hill to personally appeal to Members of Congress to pass a health information technology (Health IT) bill this session.

Health IT takes the networking and computer technology now used in business and applies it to the practice of medicine. The same systems that support the banking ATM network and that monitor retail inventories can give doctors, health-care providers and patients instant access to complete and up-to-date information on health history, test results and the latest and best medical research and procedures.

Health IT will save lives. Nearly 100,000 people die each year due to medical errors. Many of these deaths come not from a lack of medical know-how but from a lack of communication. With immediate access to vital information on a patient's history, test results, current treatments and prescriptions, doctors can make better-informed decisions.

Health IT increases convenience. Adult children of aging parents can participate in decision-making and care-giving from far away. Using two-way broadband video connections, patients who live far from their doctors can often receive medical consultations and some types of medical examinations without leaving home. Currently under development are new wearable medical-monitoring devices which will allow chronically ill patients to stay in their homes while their conditions are monitored remotely 24/7. For parents, health IT means the end of visiting a doctor's office to get vaccination and other records for routine applications for summer school, field trips and sports teams — such records may be obtained securely by remote access.

The Health IT legislation will incorporate new levels of privacy and confidentiality. Under the current paper-based systems, anyone who can open a filing cabinet can view sensitive patient information (and even copy and distribute it), then return the papers without detection. The Health IT bill establishes a firewall around patient data, requiring passwords and permission to gain access, and leaving an audit trail of who accessed the

data, when and why. Privacy violations now go unreported because there is no way to know who picks up a paper file. Health IT will end that.

Finally, health IT will help bring spiraling medical costs under control. The Rand Corp. reports that health IT could produce \$81 billion annually in savings in the form of fewer duplicate and unnecessary tests, more efficient use of providers' time, reduced spending on unnecessary and in some cases incompatible medications, and more. All of those savings will translate into lower healthcare costs for American homeowners and other consumers, either directly or indirectly.

For this to become a part of American health care, Congress must establish a legislative foundation for standards and federal support. This will create "ground rules" to allow participants in the health care industry to invest safely, knowing that they are not buying equipment and software that can be invalidated or made obsolete with the stroke of a pen.

The alliance joins with other members of HIT Now! In urging Congress to pass health IT legislation this year.

"Information technology is a basic part of transactions and activities affecting home ownership, retail transactions, education and entertainment," observed alliance president Bruce Hahn. "We should extend its benefits to the practice of medicine and the homeowners who pay for it, too."

The obvious benefits of the legislation have attracted a wide and diverse group of supporters. Coalition members include a diverse group of approximately 40 major organizations from across the political and economic spectrum working together to bring networked information systems to America's health care system. In addition to other consumer groups, members of HIT Now! Coalition include labor organizations such as the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers; disease-prevention advocacy organizations including The American Heart Association; professional associations such as the American Academy of Nursing; hospitals and clinics and major corporations, such as Boeing and Dow. The issue is uniting middle-class homeowners and major corporate leaders. The alliance's representatives and Verizon CEO Ivan Seidenberg will personally participate in the Wednesday event to encourage Members of Congress to pass a health information technology (Health IT) bill this session.

What you can do:

If you want to help, contact both of your U.S. senators and your U.S. representative and urge them to support Health IT legislation this year. You can look up their phone numbers and email addresses using the Congressional Look Up Tool on www.americanhomeowners.org.