



## Medical record e-devices get government approval

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By Julie Schmit, USA TODAY

The first electronic medical records products to win government approval were announced Tuesday, a step toward encouraging doctors to switch from paper systems.

The certification of 19 companies' products — by a national group funded by the government last year — means doctors buying the software can expect it to collect certain data, secure that data and work with other products so that records can eventually transfer among doctors, clinics and hospitals and other entities.

Electronic medical records are seen as key to modernizing the \$1.9 trillion U.S. health care system, which largely runs on paper. President Bush set 2014 as the target for all Americans to have electronic records. Today, 14% to 17% of doctors use them, says Mark Leavitt, chairman of the non-profit Certification Commission for health care Information Technology.

Leavitt's group certified 20 electronic medical records products from such companies as GE health care and Allscripts. Doctors who buy certified products face less risk that they won't work with others or will quickly become obsolete — one hurdle to electronic record adoption, Leavitt adds.

Electronic medical records can cost at least \$20,000 per doctor to implement — including software, hardware and training — and the investment takes years to show a return through increased efficiency, studies show. Knowing that a product was reviewed will help doctors make choices, says David Bates, professor of medicine at the Harvard Medical School.

Electronic records — and the ability to share patient data across multiple networks — would improve care, reduce medical errors and cut costs, said Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt, no relation to Mark Leavitt. The secretary dubbed the push for health care tech adoption as the "most important thing happening in health care."

Last year, Rand, a research firm, estimated savings of \$81 billion or more a year from moving the U.S. health care system to electronic systems from paper.

The records products named Tuesday must enable doctors to do such things as enter an order for an electronic prescription and record a laboratory result, Mark Leavitt says. But it won't be until next year that the products have to be able to transmit that data to a pharmacy or to actually receive a lab result. Today, hospitals or clinics that use electronic health records largely cannot share that data outside their own systems.

"This is just a first step along a long, long path," said HHS Secretary Leavitt. While some products have been certified, the nation still faces a far bigger challenge in that it lacks consensus on what data to collect and how to share, secure and use that data.