



ePrescribing – Benefits Beyond the Medicare 2% Bonus

By now you have heard that Medicare is offering a 2% bonus in 2009 for physicians that ePrescribe. The eHealth Initiative estimates that the nation's healthcare costs can be reduced by \$2.9 billion annually by switching to online systems such as ePrescribing. Since ePrescribing is rather inexpensive and can be done with or without an Electronic Medical Records (EMR) software package, your practice can turn this into a profitable endeavor. In addition, there are many other advantages to ePrescribing that can make your practice more efficient and allow you to provide your patients with a higher quality of patient care.

First, let's examine what happens when you prescribe a drug for a patient. You write a script on a prescription pad and hand it to the patient. The patient then takes it to the pharmacy and comes back later to pick it up and pay for it. The pharmacy staff must type the order into their computer system before filling the prescription. Of course, there are a lot of mistakes, miscommunications, twists and turns that can happen during this transaction that cost both time and money for you, the pharmacy and the patient.

Now examine this same transaction in the world of ePrescribing. According to the CA Healthcare Foundation, eliminating handwriting will reduce medication errors by 9%. Providers can obtain real-time information about potential drug-drug and drug-allergy interactions. Formulary information is also available instantly so it is much easier to prescribe a medication that is on a patient's formulary without having to do additional research. Having access to a patient's dispensed drug history allows you to make better clinical decisions at the point of care. Having access to all of this information can virtually eliminate the need for pharmacies to call medical practices and play phone tag with nurses regarding prescriptions.

Handling prescription re-fills is much easier as well. Since all prescription data is stored electronically in a database, a patient's chart does not need to be pulled and then re-filed. Ask your staff: how much time would be saved if they were able to do all of these things without having to speak with pharmacists or pull patient charts for prescription refills?

Pharmacies benefit in much the same way. They no longer have to re-enter prescriptions into their systems. They can greatly reduce the calls that they make to physician offices (and they work with many different offices, not just yours). Best of all, errors can be greatly reduced when prescriptions are received electronically. The time it takes to fill prescriptions can be reduced, offering better customer service to your patients.



Patients benefit as well. They make fewer trips to the pharmacy and their prescriptions are filled faster. Because prescriptions are sent electronically, compliance rates increase as more prescriptions are filled. Patients will have lower out of pocket costs when physicians are able to get formulary information electronically, and they will call their providers less often looking for generic equivalents of medications. Fewer adverse drug reactions thanks to the allergy and interaction information will result in a higher level of patient care as well.

Even payers and employers benefit. Costs are reduced as patients use more generic drugs. Costs from adverse drug interactions will be lower. Increased compliance leads to better patient care, which will result in fewer sick days and higher workplace productivity.

Given the benefits, it is no wonder that Medicare is looking to jump start the use of ePrescribing by physicians. Some states and/or insurance carriers are offering additional incentives as well. Best of all, if your office has a computer with an Internet connection you are ready for ePrescribing. Most ePrescribing software can be done without an electronic medical record system. For a small monthly fee (typically \$25 - \$75 per provider per month) you can start getting the many benefits of ePrescribing almost immediately. Even better, at the end of 2009 you get a 2% bonus from Medicare. (The 2% bonus is for 2009 and 2010, then is 1% in 2011 and 2012 and is 0.5% in 2013. Starting in 2013, there is a 1% Medicare cut for those providers that *do not* ePrescribe.)

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