



News Flash – On June 18, 2010, the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) issued a final rule to establish a temporary certification program for electronic health record (EHR) technology.

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Medical Record Retention and Media Formats for Medical Records

Provider Types Affected

This is an informational article for physicians, non-physician practitioners, suppliers, and providers submitting claims to Medicare contractors (carriers, fiscal intermediaries (FIs), and Medicare Administrative Contractors (MAC)) for services provided to Medicare beneficiaries.

Provider Action Needed



STOP – Impact to You

This Special Edition is informational in nature. There are no additions or changes to current policies and procedures.



CAUTION – What You Need to Know

This article provides guidance for physicians, suppliers, and providers on record retention timeframes.



GO – What You Need to Do

Review the information in this article and ensure that you are in compliance. Be sure to inform your staff.

Disclaimer

This article was prepared as a service to the public and is not intended to grant rights or impose obligations. This article may contain references or links to statutes, regulations, or other policy materials. The information provided is only intended to be a general summary. It is not intended to take the place of either the written law or regulations. We encourage readers to review the specific statutes, regulations and other interpretive materials for a full and accurate statement of their contents.

Retention Periods

State laws generally govern how long medical records are to be retained. However, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996 (HIPAA) administrative simplification rules require a covered entity, such as a physician billing Medicare, to retain required documentation for **six years from the date of its creation or the date when it last was in effect, whichever is later**. HIPAA requirements preempt State laws if they require shorter periods. **Your State may require a longer retention period.** The HIPAA requirements are available at 45 CFR 164.316(b)(2) on the Internet.

While the HIPAA Privacy Rule does not include medical record retention requirements, it does require that covered entities apply appropriate administrative, technical, and physical safeguards to protect the privacy of medical records and other protected health information (PHI) for whatever period such information is maintained by a covered entity, including through disposal. The Privacy Rule is available at 45 CFR 164.530(c) on the Internet.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) requires records of providers submitting cost reports to be retained in their original or legally reproduced form for a period of at least 5 years after the closure of the cost report. This requirement is available at 42 CFR 482.24[b][1] on the Internet.

CMS requires Medicare managed care program providers to retain records for 10 years. This requirement is available at 42 CFR 422.504 [d][2][iii] on the Internet.

Providers/suppliers should maintain a medical record for each Medicare beneficiary that is their patient. Remember that medical records must be accurately written, promptly completed, accessible, properly filed and retained. Using a system of author identification and record maintenance that ensures the integrity of the authentication and protects the security of all record entries is a good practice.

The Medicare program does not have requirements for the media formats for medical records. However, the medical record needs to be in its original form or in a legally reproduced form, which may be electronic, so that medical records may

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be reviewed and audited by authorized entities. Providers must have a medical record system that ensures that the record may be accessed and retrieved promptly.

Providers may want to obtain legal advice concerning record retention after these time periods and medical document format.

Additional Information

CMS is currently engaged in a multi-year project to offer incentives to eligible providers that meaningfully use certified electronic health records (EHRs). In close coordination with this incentive program, the Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT (ONC) has developed the initial set of standards and certification requirements for EHRs in order to promote health information exchange and interoperability. You may be eligible to receive incentive payments to assist in implementing certified EHR technology systems.

Use of “certified EHR technology” is a core requirement for physicians and other providers who seek to qualify to receive incentive payments under the Medicare and Medicaid Electronic Health Record Incentive Programs provisions authorized in the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) Act. HITECH was enacted as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009.

Additional information about this initiative may be found at on the CMS website.

If you have any questions, please contact your carrier, FI or A/B MAC, at their toll-free number, which may be found at

<http://www.cms.gov/MLNProducts/downloads/CallCenterTollNumDirectory.zip> on

the CMS website.

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