Dear CMS Partner:

As we announce today’s final rule governing Stage 2 of the Medicare and Medicaid Electronic Health Record (EHR) Incentive Programs, I wanted to take a moment to thank you for your input. Your feedback and partnership have brought us a step closer to realizing the potential of health information technology to improve health care for all Americans.

Since launching in January 2011, EHR Incentive Programs have paid $6.5 billion to more than 128,000 eligible professionals (EPs) and 3,600 eligible hospitals and critical access hospitals (CAHs) for their progress in adopting and meaningfully using EHRs. The Stage 2 rule builds upon that progress, while introducing important new criteria that are designed to improve patient safety, quality of care, and health information exchange. Highlights of the Stage 2 rule’s provisions include:

- Delays the start of Stage 2 of the EHR Incentive Programs from 2013 to 2014; beginning in 2014, providers who have met Stage 1 criteria for 2 or 3 years will need to meet Stage 2 criteria
- Reduces the timespan over which all EPs and eligible hospitals must demonstrate meaningful use in 2014—from a full year to 3 months—to allow ample time to implement, regardless of what Stage providers are in
- Specifies that all providers in their second year or more of participation will report on clinical quality measure (CQM) data electronically, starting in 2014
- More closely aligns CQMs with the Inpatient Quality Reporting Program (IQR), Physician Quality Reporting System (PQRS), and the CMS Shared Savings Program
- Adds new Stage 2 objectives to achieve better decision support, care coordination, and patient engagement
- Eliminates or combines some Stage 1 objectives, and shifts most others to Stage 2 core objectives
- Affirms a 2015 start date for payment adjustments for providers who do not achieve meaningful use of EHRs
- Provides several categories of hardship exceptions

To find out more, please join us for the CMS/National Partners Stage 2 Regulation Review conference call on August 27 from 12 pm to 1:30 pm (EDT). To access the call, please dial toll-free 1-877-267-1577 pass code: 6357. Please also visit our web page on Stage 2 at http://www.cms.gov/Regulations-and-Guidance/Legislation/EHRIncentivePrograms/Stage_2.html.

Thank you again for your contributions toward advancing health IT and improving our health care system for everyone.

Sincerely,

/s/

Robert S. Tagalicod
Director, Office of E-Health Standards and Services
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services