The healthcare bill's take on technology

By Kim Hart - 12/09/09 10:43 AM ET

As Senate Democrats negotiate to move the healthcare reform bill to a final vote in the chamber, I checked in with a health and technology expert to talk about one aspect of the bill that hasn’t received much attention: health IT.

Denise Anthony is research director for Dartmouth College’s Institute for Security, Technology and Society, as well as a faculty affiliate for the Dartmouth Institute for Health Policy and Clinical Practice.

“I was really pretty impressed with the bill,” she told me this morning. "It recognizes the role of information technology in facilitating better coordination of care and better access to primary care and research...but it’s not suggesting that technology is the silver bullet that is going to fix healthcare."

Ever since President Obama’s stimulus package set aside nearly $20 billion for health IT projects--namely electronic medical records--there's been a lot of talk about how IT will help doctors work more efficiently and give patients access to their health histories. The 2,000-page healthcare bill includes the word "technology" 26 times, and often calls for details to be addressed by the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology within the Department of Health and Human Services. (Committees in that office are currently coming up with security and privacy standards for these systems.)

The current bill also appoints an assistant secretary for health information technology and devotes resources for community-based telehealth resource centers.

"Getting the systems in place is necessary but not sufficient to improve the quality of care,” she said. "Certainly we have to have these good IT systems in place for practitioners to share information in a more efficient way. But simply putting the money toward putting them in place isn't enough."

New forms of errors are introduced with new systems. For example, electronic medical records are often hailed as a way to let primary doctors and specialists communicate with each other. But some researchers are finding that doctors are simply "cutting and pasting" information into health records that isn’t necessarily specific to the patient and isn’t as individualized as it should be.

"So there's actually less information being conveyed--the ironic unintended consequence of electronic health records,” she said.

Another potential problem: If patients gain access to their health records and can see what doctors are writing about their conditions, doctors may start to
This lady is hyper-soft-pedaling the ENORMOUS effort to implement national electronic health care records capable of being standardized and utilized by ALL healthcare providers and insurance companies. It is a bigger job than the huge Y2K replacement of all software incapable of changing dates at the turn of the millennium. The largest consolidation of electronic medical records is at an HMO in Puget Sound Washington, a mere 12 million members...took them 12 years and billions of dollars...to say nothing of issues getting physician buy in of the formats and usage. Their is NO AGREED UPON national record standard in health care at this moment...in fact there are two separate organizations competing against each other for their standard to be adopted...so of all the billions of dollars of healthcare software systems already installed in clinics, hospitals, doctors offices, laboratories, pharmacies, etc...none of them have the ability to easily just hook up with one another and exchange data all over the nation. The nation has resisted vehemently the adoption of personal ID cards and that will be REQUIRED for all people covered with the Government proposed plan...these are the Democrats that voted down VOTER ID records because it would impose a HARDSHIP on the poor and minorities to get such a record created...YET THESE are the VERY FOLKS without INSURANCE that the Congress think they can just pass a bill and immediately put them up on some MAGIC computer system. The Dartmouth folks should show some integrity and point out the truth of the situation...AND THE HEALTHCARE SOFTWARE INDUSTRY EXPECTS TO SELLS BILLIONS OF DOLLARS OF NEW SYSTEMS AND SERVICES TO MAKE THE CHANGE OUTS...OBAMA'S HEALTHCARE CZAR KNOWS ABOUT THIS...SHE SERVED ON THE BOARD OF CERNER CORPORATION WHO WILL BE ONE OF THE MAJOR PLAYERS TRYING TO SELL THEIR SYSTEMS...AND SHE HAS THOUSANDS OF SHARES OF THEIR STOCK AND OPTIONS ON MORE. This is not about just helping the sick and folks in need...this is a huge TECHNOLOGY SALES DEAL FOR MAYBE TRILLIONS OF DOLLARS TO IMPLEMENT. Shame of Dartmouth for staying quiet.

BY RUFUS LEVIN on 12/09/2009 at 14:41

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