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December 17, 2008

The Honorable Tom Daschle
Secretary-Designate
US Department of Health and Human Services
Office of the President-Elect
Washington, DC 20270

Dear Secretary-Designate Daschle:

On behalf of the Board of Directors and members of the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS), congratulations on your recent appointment as Secretary-Designate of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Director of the White House Office of Health Reform! We enjoyed working with you and your US Senate staff and look forward to strengthening our relationship with you and your staff at HHS and the White House.

2009 is the year for healthcare reform in the United States. HIMSS believes that lives can be saved, outcomes of care improved, and costs reduced by transforming the healthcare system through the appropriate use of information technology (IT) and management systems.

HIMSS focuses exclusively on ensuring the optimal use of healthcare information technology (IT) and management systems for the betterment of healthcare. Founded in 1961, HIMSS represents more than 20,000 individual members – of which 73% work in provider settings – and over 350 corporate members that collectively represent organizations employing millions of people.

Today, we released our recommendations to realize your vision of a transformed US healthcare system. We welcome the opportunity to meet with you and your team to discuss how to harness the following recommendations to both stimulate the US economy and reform healthcare.

Invest a minimum of \$25 billion in health IT to help non-governmental hospitals and physician practices adopt electronic medical records (EMRs). Additional funding should be allocated to cover EMR adoption by federal and state-owned healthcare providers, and establish health IT Action Zones. HIMSS also calls for the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) to be expanded to make health IT available to Medicaid and SCHIP providers of healthcare to children.

Apply recognized standards and certified health IT products among all federally funded health programs by requiring that federal funding to assist providers and payors within these programs adopt health IT only be used for the purchase or upgrade of new health IT products that apply Healthcare Information Technology Standards Panel (HITSP) interoperability specifications and have Certification Commission for Health Information Technology (CCHIT) certification.

Expand Stark Exemptions and Anti-Kickback Safe Harbors for EMRs to cover additional healthcare software and related devices that apply HITSP interoperability specifications, are CCHIT-certified, and allow for better coordination of care and information sharing among related providers and their patients. In carrying-out out this recommendation, the Secretary should implement necessary measures and requirements to protect against conflict of interest and improper relationships among providers.

Codify and authorize the following:

- A. **Codify HITSP as the National Standards Harmonization Body** responsible for collaborating with the public and private sector to achieve a widely accepted and useful set of standards to enable the widespread interoperability among healthcare software applications. Adequate funding should be authorized and appropriated for HITSP from FY10 – FY14.
- B. **Codify a Senior Level Health IT Leader within the Administration** to oversee a national health IT strategy.
- C. **Authorize a Federal Advisory and Coordinating Body for Health IT.** Based on the experiences of the AHIC and its Successor organization, the US Congress should authorize a federal advisory committee – operating under the Federal Advisory Committee Act – responsible for advising the Administration on health IT initiatives throughout the US and coordinating standards harmonization through collaboration with HITSP and CCHIT.

Conduct a White House Summit on Healthcare Reform through Information Technology to develop consensus and propose solutions to critical, national health IT issues within the context of the larger national healthcare reform effort.

An executive summary is attached. Our full report is available online at www.himss.org/2009CalltoAction.

Our recommendations can aid in the Economic Stimulus Plan. For example, investing 1% of US healthcare expenditures on health IT would not only stimulate the economy by creating jobs, but also allow payers and providers to implement the necessary health IT to reduce healthcare costs. Health IT Action Zones will also create jobs by enabling the adoption of health IT by individuals from vulnerable populations, as well as by providers who care for patients who are medically underserved and are impacted by health and/or digital disparities.

Secretary-Designate Daschle, we gladly join you in realizing your vision of a transformed healthcare system. We would appreciate an opportunity to have a detailed discussion regarding these recommendations with you and the Healthcare Policy Transition Team. We can be reached by phone at (312) 915-9225 or via email at slieber@himss.org and cchristian@gshvin.org.

Sincerely,

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The signature on the left is 'Steve Lieber' and the signature on the right is 'Charles E. Christian'.

H. Stephen Lieber, CAE
HIMSS President/CEO

Charles E. Christian, FCHIME, FHIMSS
Chair, HIMSS Board of Directors
Director IS/CIO
Good Samaritan Hospital

