



February 4, 2009

Senator Harry Reid
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Reid:

On behalf of the Board of Directors and members of the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS), we sincerely appreciate your service and commitment to ensuring the sustainability and productivity of the U.S. economy and long-term viability of healthcare. As you address an economic stimulus package in the 111th Congress, we ask that you take careful consideration of the needed IT infrastructure improvements for healthcare throughout the U.S.

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.

Our members believe the U.S. needs a healthcare infrastructure that will provide for the secure, interoperable exchange of health information among clinicians, payers, public health, and consumers throughout the U.S.; improved quality and safety of the care provided; and, decreasing costs – all of which hold great promise for improving the overall quality, cost, and access to care.

Examples of the benefits can be found in many states – from Maine to Washington. Through effective use of health IT, higher-quality patient care can be achieved by transforming care delivery, adopting a patient-focused culture, and implementing a technology plan to support the care delivery process¹. Physician practices can improve patient care by reducing delays in reviewing labs and radiology reports and making clinical information accessible to providers on nights and weekends.² Electronic medication administration records integrated with pharmacy systems contributes to reducing medication errors. Remote access to radiology images helps eliminate duplicative tests, and emergency room patients get faster treatment because physicians don't have drive in from home in the middle of the night to read a film.³

¹ <http://www.himss.org/ASP/ContentRedirector.asp?ContentID=68465&type=HIMSSNewsItem>

² Ibid.

³ http://www.himss.org/advocacy/d/EMR_Outcomes20081217.pdf

It's fortunate that some healthcare systems and physician practices in the U.S. have had the financial wherewithal to make these investments and realize the benefits. Unfortunately, while many doctors realize the positive impact successful EHR implementation can have on a practice, the Congressional Budget Office reported in May, 2008, that as of 2006, only 12 percent of physicians and 11 percent of hospitals have adopted all or most recommended health IT functionalities.⁴ Survey results published in the July 3, 2008, issue of *The New England Journal of Medicine* found that 66 percent of doctors who have not adopted an EHR system cited cost as the biggest barrier to adoption.⁵

The same study reports that 93% of the physicians using fully functioning EHR systems are generally satisfied with the systems.⁶ Further, 82% of physicians who had fully functional EHR systems reported positive effects of the system on the quality of clinical decisions.⁷

An added benefit for physicians could be lower malpractice insurance costs. The Congressional Budget Office reports that multiple physician liability insurance firms offer discounts to practices that have adopted EHR systems.⁸

The economy will benefit from an investment in health IT. According to research by IBM and the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, investing \$10 billion in EHRs and other health-related IT projects would create 212,000 jobs.⁹

Furthermore, multiple independent studies have shown substantial return on investment for health IT, which could help lower healthcare costs.

In January, 2009 Deloitte LLP reported that investing in e-prescribing and electronic medical records, along with better coordination of patient care through primary-care doctors, would result in 10-year savings of \$530 billion.¹⁰

The RAND Corporation reported in a 2005 study that widespread health IT adoption (90 percent of hospitals and physicians) could save \$77 billion annually.¹¹ In testimony presented before the Senate Finance Committee on July 17, 2008, RAND forecast that during the 15-year adoption period, cumulative net savings would be about \$510 billion or approximately \$34 billion per year.¹²

The Center for Information Technology Leadership estimated in a 2005 study that full implementation of health IT could yield annual savings of \$77.8 billion.¹³

⁴ <http://www.cbo.gov/ftpdocs/91xx/doc9168/05-20-HealthIT.pdf>

⁵ <http://content.nejm.org/cgi/content/full/359/1/50>

⁶ <http://content.nejm.org/cgi/content/full/359/1/50>

⁷ <http://content.nejm.org/cgi/content/full/359/1/50>

⁸ <http://www.cbo.gov/ftpdocs/91xx/doc9168/05-20-HealthIT.pdf>

⁹ <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123120010817055565.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.deloitte.com/dtt/article/0,1002,sid%253D80772%2526cid%253D242410,00.html>

¹¹ http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/2005/RAND_RB9136.pdf

¹² http://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/2008/RAND_CT312.pdf

¹³ <http://content.healthaffairs.org/cgi/reprint/hlthaff.w5.10v1>

And, patients will benefit from an investment in health IT. When used properly, EHR systems can help keep patients safe by alerting clinicians to harmful drug interactions or allergic reactions to prescribed medicines, and helping clinicians effectively manage the health of patients with complex chronic conditions.

Evidence of improvements in patient health associated with IT has been shown:

The Jan. 26, 2009, issue of the *Archives of Internal Medicine* includes a study by Johns Hopkins School of Medicine that found a 15 percent reduction in patient mortality rates during hospitalization at centers that use computers instead of paper.¹⁴

A 2002 study reported in the *Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association* suggests that health IT could reduce the average length of a hospital by reducing delays associated with certain hospital functions and by avoiding costly errors.¹⁵

Finally, we hope you will encourage others in the Senate that patient health information is kept private and secure when products certified by the Certification Commission for Healthcare Information Technology (CCHIT) are properly used.

We ask that health IT be recognized as a pivotal component of economic stimulus and continued inclusion in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

I can be reached by phone at (312) 915-9225 or by email at slieber@himss.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steve Lieber". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Steve" and last name "Lieber" clearly distinguishable.

H. Stephen Lieber, CAE
HIMSS President/CEO

¹⁴ <http://archinte.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/short/169/2/105>

¹⁵ <http://www.jamia.org/cgi/content/abstract/9/5/529>