April 9, 2010

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius  
Secretary of Health and Human Services  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20201

Dr. David Blumenthal  
National Coordinator for Health Information Technology  
Office of the National Coordinator  
200 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius and Dr. Blumenthal:

On behalf of the Board of Directors and members of the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS), we are pleased to submit written comments on the Department of Health and Human Services notice of proposed rule making entitled, Proposed Establishment of Certification Programs for Health Information Technology that was posted on the Department’s website and in the Federal Register on March 8, 2010. The following comments are focused on the Temporary Certification Program. Comments on the Permanent Certification Program will be submitted under separate cover in May 2010.

HIMSS is the healthcare industry’s membership organization exclusively focused on providing leadership for the optimal use of healthcare information technology and management systems for the betterment of healthcare. HIMSS represents more than 27,000 individual, 400 corporate members, more than 50 non-profit organizations, and 46 chapters nationwide. HIMSS seeks to shape healthcare best practices and policy through its educational, professional development, informatics and government relations initiatives designed to promote the best use of information and management systems in patient care.

HIMSS is a strong proponent of developing tools and resources that aid providers’ purchasing decisions and usability of health information technology. The focus on a phased maturation in the critical areas of electronic health record (EHR) product functionality, security, and interoperability will address provider-driven requirements that ensure products entering the health IT marketplace meet minimum criteria in these three areas as the U.S. moves forward toward the development of a Nationwide Health Information Network.

As stated in the proposed rule, section 3001( c)(5) of the Public Health Service Act, as added by the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health Act (HITECH Act) grants the authority to the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology to establish a certification program to test and certify health information technology solutions. HIMSS supports the establishment of both a temporary and permanent certification program under which Complete EHRs and EHR Modules could be tested and certified.
With the passage of ARRA and the pending final rule for Stage I of the Medicare and Medicaid Electronic Health Record Incentive Programs, the needs and requirements for certified electronic health record technology must continue to become standards based, patient centric and interoperable. Evolving to equip providers with the capacity to provide clinical decision support, support clinician order entry, capture and query information relevant to health care quality, and exchange electronic health information with, and integrate such information from other sources. The next phase of the NHIN envisions complete and modular EHRs interacting with other health IT solutions to provide clinicians and patients with the necessary tools to support informed healthcare decisions that both improve the quality and safety of care and decrease the cost of redundant, unnecessary, or erroneous care.

In order to be meaningful users of these certified technologies, providers need to have the assurance that EHR products meet standardized testing and certification criteria. The timeline for Stage I of Meaningful Use is approaching very rapidly. Providers need to know which organizations will be testing and certifying products under the Temporary Certification Program. Additionally, providers will need to be able to review a listing of certified technologies to assist them in selection and purchase of EHR products.

It is with this urgency in mind that HIMSS supports the establishment of the Temporary Certification Process without delay. Clinicians and patients will benefit from purchasing health IT solutions that will improve access to quality outcomes, enhanced workflow, user acceptance and cost effective healthcare. Finally, HIMSS appreciates the fact that ARRA created many challenges and opportunities for the federal government and the healthcare community. With the support of the healthcare community, the Temporary Certification Process can be an important stepping stone to a robust Permanent Certification Process that supports the development of the NHIN. We appreciate your effort to engage healthcare stakeholders in reviewing the proposed rule and look forward to future dialog with the Department and ONC on this important issue. Our staff point of contact is Mr. Tom Leary, Sr. Director for Federal Affairs.

Sincerely,

Barry P. Chaiken, MD, FHIMSS
Chair, HIMSS Board of Directors
CMO, DocsNetwork, Ltd.
CMO, Imprivata, Inc.

H. Stephen Lieber, CAE
President/CEO
HIMSS