

Understanding the 21st Century Cures Act

Here's what you need to know.

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We've all been there—for any number of reasons, we found ourselves in the urgent care office, after hours on a weekend. Images confirmed that while nothing was broken, it would be best to follow-up with our own provider if the pain and limited mobility continues more than a couple of days. It sounds simple enough.

Soon, the pain has increased and your foot seems slightly more swollen. A quick call to your podiatry office starts the adventure. They request a copy of the imaging report for comparison with the x-rays they took. With your first hopeful call to the Urgent Care center, you learn their imaging is managed by an independent radiology group that can be reached at a different number. Three calls and a quick stop at the business office later, you have faxed the request for a Release of Medicare Records Authorization form to the imaging office so that results can be sent to your podiatrist.

As your care is escalated to additional therapy or surgical care, the web of those who need access to specific portions of your records grows. This hospital uses their own patient portal system that may or may not speak with an independent podiatry group who has yet another patient portal system. The terms “interoperability” or even “coordination of care” really lose their practical application in a competitive health-care environment. Is there hope for

a simplified solution on the horizon? There may be with the implementation and enforcement of the 21st Century Cures Act.

What Is the Cures Act?

The 21st Century Cures Act is a federal law created by The Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) to advance interoperability; support the access, exchange, and use of elec-

quirements for health IT certification, and establishes information blocking exceptions for healthcare. In short, The Cures Act will transform how we exchange healthcare data.

What Does the Cures Act Mean for Podiatrists?

The big takeaway for healthcare providers, including podiatrists, is that they must give patients access to EHI at their request, in the manner re-

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tronic health information (EHI); and address occurrences of information blocking. It aims to achieve true healthcare information data portability and accessibility in the U.S. healthcare system.

The Cures Act applies to patients, doctors and hospitals, and health information technology (health IT) developers and will impact them in a variety of ways. It allows patients to easily access and transfer their health data while protecting their privacy and providing security for that data, provides implementation re-

quested, and not engage in information blocking. In the Cures Act, ONC also provides guidance on information blocking and defines eight specific exceptions that allow clinicians and hospitals flexibilities related to: preventing harm, privacy, security, infeasibility, health IT performance, content and manner, fees, and licensing.

The Cures Act will also promote modern technology approaches, allowing clinicians and hospitals to easily provide patients with access to their information in a fully automat-

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ed, low-cost manner. Application programming interface (API) standards will encourage secure access to data, reducing the burden on providers and

your next important step is to evaluate how the technology you use in your practice will support you in achieving the goals and requirements of this new regulation. Does your current electronic health record “play nice”

patients have the least amount of web tracing or repetitive care due to incomplete records? **PM**

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health systems by making physician chart requests easy and allowing providers to easily switch health systems and software.

Conclusion

The ONC’s Final Rule is designed to give patients and their healthcare providers secure access to health information. When thinking about preparing your practice for the Cures Act,

with other vendors and technology? Does it make it easy and efficient to interoperate and share patient information? The Cures Act calls on the healthcare industry to adopt standardized application programming interfaces (APIs) that will support secure and easy access to electronic health information, while improving the visibility of health care services, quality, and costs. How will you ensure your

References

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 2. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/05/01/2020-07419/21st-century-cures-act-interoperability-information-blocking-and-the-onc-health-it-certification>, 45 CFR § 164.524
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