TECHNOLOGY
from your PRESIDENT

Medical Information Technology

Health Information Technology and The New Administration:

PRESIDENT-ELECT OBAMA PUSHES NEW TECHNOLOGIES

By Bernd Wollschlaeger, M.D., FAAFP, FASAM

During the presidential election campaign both leading Republican and Democratic candidates emphasized the importance of health information technology to improve and reform our ailing healthcare system.

President-Elect Obama has outlined the core component of his health IT proposal on his web site as follows: to invest $10 billion a year over the next five years to promote broad adoption of standards-based electronic health information systems, including electronic health records. He also plans to phase in requirements for full implementation of health IT and appoint the nation's first chief technology officer (CTO) to coordinate the government's technology infrastructure, work on issues of transparency, and "employ technology and innovation to solve our nation's most pressing problems." Obama pledged to appoint a CTO to ensure that federal agencies have access to the best IT infrastructure policies and services. The CTO's role is to ensure the safety of government networks and coordinate efforts with agency CTOs and chief information officers.

The primary goal of the Obama healthcare plan is to increase access to care and decrease healthcare costs. This will require the installation and implementation of new information management system as a virtual infrastructure to manage the anticipated demand for medical services to be provided to previously uninsured patients.

His transition team already includes two technology advisers: Washington technology policy expert Julius Genachowski, an Internet business veteran and former executive of Barry Diller's IAC/InterActiveCorp.; and Sonal Shah, a tech execu-

tive from Google's philanthropy division, Google.org. Obama's choice of two technology experts to help guide his transition into office has bolstered his previous assertion that technology will play a major role in the new administration. And Obama has made it clear that health information technology will play a central role in his plan to overhaul the health system.

Already, leading healthcare IT proponents are supporting Obama's proactive position regarding healthcare IT implementation. For example, the independent, non-profit, eHealth Initiative applauded President-Elect Obama's inclusion of electronic medical records for every doctor's office and hospital in the country in his Economic Recovery Plan, key elements of which were announced as part of his December 6, 2008 Weekly Radio Address.

We should not wait for the implementation of those plans but start preparing our offices for the digital revolution. This will include targeted and systematic identification and extraction of relevant information from patient health records to be later transferred into electronic medical records. A proactive attitude and guided efforts as described above will help us to reduce the friction associated with the implementation of new technology solutions. I will provide tips and support regarding this topic in an upcoming issue and will post those tips on our web site, too.

Disclosure: *The author is a practicing family physician, addiction specialist and computer consultant. In addition, he is a founder and managing partner of a medical IT company.*