

Advocacy Day 2008 Impressions

Attending this year's HIMSS Advocacy Day provided a unique opportunity to view firsthand the ability to present specific actionable steps to advance the adoption of health information technology in this country. The national HIMSS website reports 200 people from 41 states attended this year's advocacy day in Washington D.C. to accomplish this task. HIMSS Advocacy Day comprised of Chapter Advocacy Liaison Roundtable training, presentations regarding specific legislative requests for Advocacy Day 2008, and scheduled meetings with the offices of senators and congressman to discuss these legislative requests.

The ability for the New England chapter alone to visit the staff offices of representatives from at least five states also provides insight to the significant role the New England chapter can play in driving HIT adoption at a state, regional and national level.

The New England chapter is uniquely positioned to leverage three key assets: 1) representation of NEHIMSS & 6 states at the legislative level with 12 senators and 22 representatives in congress; 2) legislative leadership in creating and sponsoring key healthcare and healthcare information technology legislation; 3) reputation of NEHIMSS at the member level including leading healthcare information technology companies, prestigious healthcare delivery systems and academic institutions, well-educated professionals and leaders in their field.

New England Legislative Representation

The New England HIMSS chapter states account for roughly 12% of senators and 5% of representatives of congress with respect to the United States total. In both congress and the senate, these legislators have above average length of service, which equates to both political experience and influence to sponsor or help pass key legislation. The NEHIMSS chapter, by interacting with these key decision makers, can have a far greater impact on the adoption of healthcare technology initiatives at the federal level.

New England Legislative Leadership in the Healthcare Policy Field

The origin of influential legislation and the associated dialogue at both the state and national level was sourced to legislators in the New England region. A few are as follows: Vermont state proposals for funding healthcare IT, RI/NH current proposed legislation reviewing updating privacy laws, New Hampshire e-prescribing leadership, Senator Kennedy sponsored S.1693 Wired for Health Care Quality Act, and Maine inclusion within the EHR Adoption demo for CMS CHR. This region is known to have influence and leading policy makers in the healthcare field. The NEHIMSS group should leverage such influence within the House and Senate to ensure healthcare technology is appropriately incorporated into such legislation. NEHIMSS can help these legislators to educate others both within and outside of the New England region on the benefit such technology investments and enabling policies will have to the healthcare delivery system on the local, state and national level.

Professional Leadership of the New England Constituency

The professionals and organizations representing NEHIMSS during this advocacy event reinforced the professional resources the chapter can utilize as needed. This group included CIO credentials and leadership associated with a prestigious academic medical school and clinical research institute, nationally ranked hospital, and innovative data exchange. Adding to the depth of professional knowledge and standing included the attendance of a physician representing a leading healthcare technology player and a CTO from a leading performance improvement organization. Numerous other participants, each with 15 or more years of experience in this area portrayed the breadth of knowledge the NEHIMSS chapter can provide. It should be noted that the predominance of New England healthcare professionals and related academic centers, technology centers, etc. plays an important role in leading research in these areas as well as benefiting from capital investments in pursuing such research in the future.

Summary

The opportunity for NEHIMSS within the area of advocacy and healthcare policy can be summarized by the following recognition of one of its member states. Massachusetts can be applauded for its highest adoption rate of ePrescribing at 13%. Massachusetts and the rest of the country, however, should significantly raise the bar from 13%. As the 9th district congressman from Washington State noted in his Advocacy Day keynote address, if one had kidney problems 50+ years ago it was not a systemic problem as treatment options were very limited and a fatal outcome was almost guaranteed. Today it is a systemic problem because the technology exists to restore your health and keep you alive with the necessary dilemmas of determining payment protocols and cost planning.

Similarly, appropriating capital investments needs, assessing data privacy requirements and other discussion points to adopt such enabling healthcare information technologies is an excellent dilemma to have as such technologies adopted in the right way will help restore the health of the healthcare system and ensure its survival. NEHIMSS, in partnership with legislators and associated constituent members and organizations, can play a leading role in helping advocate the necessary policy to ensure its adoption.

NEHIMSS will continue to work with its members, affiliated organizations and legislators at both the state level and national level to achieve this goal. Within future newsletters, the NEHIMSS group will continue to provide updates on this important topic and specific upcoming NEHIMSS advocacy programs.

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Links and Footnotes

To view all HIMSS advocacy and public policy center material, please visit <http://www.himss.org/advocacy>. Specific legislation tracked to your district can be found via <http://capwiz.com/himss/home/>.

Footnote 1 – Advocacy Day 2008 Requests sourced from HIMSS Advocacy Day Materials.

In representing HIMSS within these meetings, attendees conveyed the goal of HIMSS as well as specific legislative requests for funding and legislation approval as follows:

Advocacy Day 2008 Requests¹

Goal

Our goal is to transform the safety, quality and efficiency of healthcare through the rapid adoption and use of health information technology and management systems as critical tools in that endeavor.

Funding

- Fully fund the President's FY2009 Health Information Technology Budget Request for the Department of Health and Human Services of \$118 million as a minimum baseline for transforming healthcare using information technology and management systems.
- Fund the Office for the Advancement of Telehealth (OAT) at \$13.8 million in FY2009.

Legislation

- As proposed in S. 1693 and H.R. 3800, codify the Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT in order to accelerate the appropriate development of health information exchange through integration and interoperability, standards adoption, and privacy and security in the healthcare community.
- Pass S. 2408/H.R. 4296 (Medicare Electronic Medication and Safety Protection [E-MEDS] Act of 2007) as one of many steps needed to implement a longitudinal lifetime electronic health record.
- Support S. 2812, the Telehealth Improvement Act of 2008, sponsored by Senators Kent Conrad (D-ND) and Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) to add originating sites (skilled nursing facilities, dialysis centers & community mental health centers) and new telehealth providers (physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech language pathologists & diabetes educators).
- Support H.R. 6163, the Medicare Telehealth Enhancement Act of 2008, to improve and expand telehealth services and access to those services.

Healthcare facility site visits

Visit a healthcare facility in your home state to learn more about how Health Information Technology is transforming the lives of your constituents.