

For Immediate Release
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ACLA Testifies in Favor of Health IT Legislation

(Washington, D.C.) – The American Clinical Laboratory Association today told a congressional committee that H.R. 4157, the Health Information Technology Promotion Act, would help advance the adoption of health information technology throughout the health care system.

ACLA President Alan Mertz appeared before the House Energy and Commerce subcommittee on health. The subcommittee is considering “proposals that would promote electronic health records and a smarter health information system.”

H.R. 4157 would make “several needed improvements to facilitate the diffusion of health IT throughout the United States,” Mr. Mertz said. “Among the improvements are new anti-kickback safe harbors and Stark law exceptions; a study of, and subsequent authority to preempt some, state privacy laws; and the replacement of ICD-9 diagnosis codes with ICD-10 codes.” ACLA recommends at least a five-year transition period to the new ICD codes.

Mr. Mertz noted that virtually every health care entity that’s developing an electronic health IT infrastructure “is looking to laboratories *first*.” That’s because laboratories “play a critical role in health care delivery by allowing for the rapid and timely utilization of health information by providers. Laboratories and the medical information they provide are the heart of the medical record.”

“Laboratory data represent 60 percent of the medical record,” Mr. Mertz said. “Diagnostic tests comprise only 5 percent of total hospital costs and only 1.6 percent of Medicare costs, but they influence a much larger portion (as much as 60-70 percent) of clinical decision-making that improves care and decreases cost.”

Mr. Mertz cited a recent eHealth Initiative survey that found 60 percent of health care entities pursuing HIT plan to exchange laboratory information within six months to support quality, safety and efficiency goals. The top IT function in the majority of hospitals today is the electronic order entry and review of results for diagnostic services.

E-health has shown promise for patients, providers and payers. For instance, ordering lab services and getting lab test results electronically “improves legibility, decreases error rates, produces more timely results (including STAT testing), and allows the monitoring of redundant or duplicative testing,” Mr. Mertz said. “The result is improved clinical outcomes, and improved clinical care efficiency with the long-term benefit of reduced health care costs.”

Mr. Mertz noted “that every effort in the health care public policy arena aims to improve three different aspects of health care: better, faster, and cheaper. Nothing to date has been able to meet all three objectives – some systems provide two of the three but always at the expense of the third. I believe health IT is the answer. Health IT will make health care better by improving outcomes; faster, by facilitating not only the delivery of information but the coordination of care; and cheaper, by reducing the costs of doing business, be it a reduction in duplicative testing or by saving precious time previously spent on data entry.”

ACLA is an association that represents local, regional and national clinical laboratories throughout the United States.

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