



# The Collector Beat

March 2010



Well it seems as if we're finally getting past the snow and the cold and are well on our way to blooming flowers and short-sleeve shirts! (Knock on wood.) I hope each of you have a merry St. Patty's and a merry March! Enjoy this month's issue of *The Collector Beat!*

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## Expecting a Surge in US Medical Schools

By Anemona Hartocollis

Peter Allen applied to 30 medical schools after graduating from the University of Pittsburgh last year. Twenty-eight said no.

Of the two that said yes, one had something in common with Mr. Allen: It, too, was starting out in medicine. He enrolled in the inaugural class of The Commonwealth Medical College in Scranton, PA.

"I was ecstatic that I had been accepted to a medical school," Mr. Allen said, adding that he would have gone for a master's in bioengineering if he had not been accepted. "It's a giant sigh of relief; it secures your plans for the rest of your life really."

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## The Medical Debt Relief Act

by Reid Cramer

It is not surprising that American families are feeling the strain of unaffordable health care costs. Premium costs for family insurance coverage have jumped 131% between 1999 and 2009, well over three times the rate at which wages rose during this time.

Millions of jobs have been lost during the recession putting unemployed workers at risk of also being without health insurance. As employers struggle with economic uncertainty and ever-increasing healthcare costs, many have pushed more of the costs of health insurance and care onto their workers. Trends show an increasing number of Americans living in households where health insurance premiums and out of pocket expense threaten their financial well-being.

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## Fast Company Selects Top 10 Innovators in Healthcare

By Bernie Monegain

NEW YORK – GE, athenahealth, and Sermo are among the top 10 innovative healthcare companies named by Fast Company. Kaiser Permanente is the sole healthcare provider on the list.

GE was recognized for its Healthymagination initiatives, athenahealth for its work on the physician billing, practice management and medical records front, and Sermo for its online physician community.

"This recognition is emblematic of a culture and spirit at Kaiser Permanente that enables the transformation of healthcare," said Kaiser Permanente CIO Philip Fasano.

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## \$1 Billion Awarded for Grants in Health IT

WASHINGTON -- Nearly \$1 billion in stimulus money was awarded to help healthcare providers push health information technology and job training, U.S. Cabinet members said.

The awards from the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act will help make health IT available to more than 100,000 hospitals and primary care physicians by 2014, as well as train thousands of people for careers in healthcare and information technology, Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and Labor Secretary Hilda Solis said in a release.

The more than \$750 million in Health and Human Services awards are part of a federal plan to build capacity for widespread and meaningful use of health IT, Sebelius said.

"Health information technology can make our healthcare system more efficient and improve the quality of care we all receive," Sebelius said.

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## FL Hospitals Give Twitter Updates from Inside the OR

Florida's Fawcett Memorial Hospital will soon begin using social networking website Twitter to give family members updates on patients in surgery.

"We're able to be inside the surgical room while a patient is having surgery, tweeting out updates," says the hospital director of marketing Michelle Ritter.

Through the use of Twitter, family and friends are kept informed throughout the surgery.

Because of HIPAA laws, the patient is only referred to as "patient of" and their doctor's name.

"Things like doctor has made the first incision, or the patient is sleeping," said Ritter.

Before Twitter updates, family members had to wait in a room for any updates. The monitor only displays whether the patient is in pre-op, the operating room, or the recovery room.

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## Docs Using Mobile Apps at the Point of Care

By Kyle Hardy

The introduction of a medical check list for the iPhone could be a benefit to providers as mobile technology is quickly being integrated into the care process.

Peter Waegemann, vice president of development for the mHealth Initiative, Inc. says so many health professionals have started using smartphones to help administer better care that some say they "don't know how colleagues manage without them."

Official statistics aren't published, "but anecdotal reports confirm that many doctors are using the iPhone at the point of care," says Waegemann. "There are several hospitals where all doctors are using the iPhone."

The iPhone currently has more than 1,000 medical apps aimed at both patients and physicians to better manage health and care. Applications like Safe OR, designed by QxMD, is a mobile checklist designed to increase survival rates during surgery.

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## Five Healthcare IT Decisions to Avoid

By Chip Means

Providers eager to capitalize on incentives offered through the federal government's definition of 'meaningful use' of healthcare IT may find themselves evaluating their relationships with existing and new IT vendors.

Modifying an agreement with a vendor during the contract phases can be a crucial step to aligning IT projects with federal incentive funds, said Jeffery Daigrepoint, senior VP at Coker Group. "Many vendors offer a money back guarantee if their product does not comply with stimulus," Daigrepoint said. "Every contract should have a warranty that requires a vendor to correct defects at their expenses and under NO circumstances should you ever sign a contract without being entitled to future upgrades and new releases."

Daigrepoint, who has no financial ties with any vendors, provided *Healthcare IT News* with his list of five healthcare IT decisions to avoid.

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## Survey Shows Nearly Half of Healthcare Organizations Already Compliant with Federal Privacy Laws

In a survey of more than 200 unique hospitals from across the US, nearly half of healthcare organizations (or 47.3 percent) believe their organization is already compliant with federal privacy laws such as ARRA HITECH and HIPAA and is audit ready. However, nearly one-third of survey respondents stated they will not be compliant with ARRA HITECH requirements by the set deadlines. The survey reveals that organizations are concerned with the challenges of monitoring dozens of healthcare applications, as well as deploying key technologies that will meet "accounting of disclosure," user privacy monitoring and patient and user privacy monitoring requirements.

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## How to Secure Health Care Data to Meet HITECH Act Compliance

By Gretchen Hellman

The Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health Act was enacted as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. The HITECH Act imposes certain requirements on vendors of personal health records (and other related entities) in the event of certain security breaches relating to protected health information. Here, Knowledge Center contributor Gretchen Hellman explains the new HITECH Act compliance requirements, their implications and some best practices for meeting HITECH Act compliance

In February 2009, President Obama signed the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) Act as part of his overall economic stimulus plan. The HITECH Act continues the effort of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) to encourage movement to electronic patient records and to deliver stricter data protection regulations for more secure patient privacy.

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## Priming the Pump - HITECH Q&A

- Q: Will ambulatory surgical centers be eligible for incentive payments under the Recovery Act's Medicare and Medicaid electronic health record (EHR) incentive programs?
- Q: Which office of federal government provides this money and are there any websites providing forms and information for physicians?
- Q: As the Administrator for an independent pathology laboratory we are in the midst of implementation of EMR to connect us with our outside clinics and hospitals we service. To date, we have yet to find the available qualifications that fit our practice for incentive measures. Could you please tell me how our particular practice would qualify?
- Q: Do community mental health centers and substance abuse treatment facilities qualify for Medicaid incentive payments?
- Q: Do dentists qualify for "meaningful use" incentives?

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## Will the Feds Delay HITECH Business Associate Provisions?

By Dom Nicastro

A HIPAA privacy and security law firm is saying that OCR will delay enforcement of the HITECH provisions regarding business associates (BA) because it has yet to publish its own regulations surrounding those provisions.

Hunton & Williams LLP blogged Friday that Adam H. Greene, Office of the General Counsel for OCR, said the BA provisions will be delayed until final rules addressing those provisions are published. Greene spoke Thursday at the American Bar Association's 11th Annual Conference on Emerging Issues in Healthcare Law.

Though OCR has not published anything formally announcing a delay, at least one HIPAA expert believes a delay is likely.

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## Say What?

By Jim Struck

Truly listening – to ourselves, to other people – is a gift. Think about it. How often does something turn out badly because we failed to listen?

Listening is not just about hearing and understanding, it is one of the key ways we connect with people. Listening is a cornerstone behavior when establishing respect and trust with others. Am I heard? Is he/she interested in what I have to say? Am I important to this person? Do my ideas matter?

Whether it is a function of training, time or interest, one of the chief complaints I hear about leaders is that they don't listen. It is important leaders are clear in their communications, such as having clear expectations about the job or the assignment.

Leaders can benefit from being more articulate and good at expressing themselves.

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## Potent Quotables:

“Promises make debt, and debt makes promises.”

-Dutch proverb

## When is the Best Time to Report a Payment to your Collection Agency? NOW!

When a patient is in collections and pays their bill directly to the office in which the bill was generated, that patient expects the collection phone calls and letters to stop. Without proper notification, a collection agency will assume the bill is still unpaid and continue to make contact. As a service provider, you want to make sure your patient is taken care of and that (s)he is happy. If a patient continues to receive phone calls from collectors after making a payment, they will be upset and contact you. This, in turn, may damage the relationship between your practice and your patient.

As an agency, our job is to make sure we accurately reflect the status of an account on the patient's credit bureau report (CBR). A patient has 30 days from the date the account is assigned to a collection agency to pay the balance without affecting their CBR. If the account is not paid in full within those 30 days, the patient's credit will be affected for 7 years. If a patient were to pay your office within the 30 days and the collection agency is not notified as soon as the account is paid, this account could end up on the patient's CBR and will affect what they may or may not be able to purchase in the future at no fault of their own. The longer a patient's unpaid balance is listed on their CBR, the lower their credit score will be. Even if the patient pays your office after the 30 days, the collection agency still needs to be notified immediately to update the patient's CBR accurately.

## A Day in the Life of a Debt Collector

By Brian O'Connell

We've regularly chronicled the chilling effect of debt collection practices on U.S. consumer. In doing so, consumers have a long list of complaints about scams, aggressive calls, illegal threats, and nasty encounters. But life is a two-way street and debt collections have stories of their own to tell – and here's where they get their chance.

To begin, we need some perspective. True, on the list of issues you'll face today, getting a call from a bill collector ranks somewhere between root canal and getting sued after your latest appearance on the Jerry Springer show.

According to a recent study by Scripps Howard, 40% of respondents said they had been threatened by a collections agent or had experienced enough calls from collections agent that they deemed it “harassment.”

But collections agents point out that trying to pry money out of late-paying consumers is no picnic, either. Data from the Association of Credit and Collections Professionals says that collections agents don't last long – more than half don't make it past five years before they switch vocations.

Beneath the surface, there's a lot more to the day-to-day job than meets the eye. Most bill collectors don't spend all their time on the phone hectoring consumers over their debts.

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## Upcoming Seminars:

**April:** 13—Charlotte, NC  
14—Cary, NC  
15—Richmond, VA

**May:** 11—Rockville, MD  
12—King of Prussia, PA  
13—Harrisburg, PA

**June:** 15—Cuyahoga Falls, OH  
16—PittsbuArgh, PA

**July:** 13—Hunt Valley, MD  
14—Wilmington, DE  
15—Allentown, PA

**Sept:** 14—Cincinnati, OH/  
N. Kentucky  
15—Columbus, OH

**Oct:** 13—Indianapolis, IN  
14—Oak Brook, IL  
15—Oak Brook, IL

**Nov:** 9—Scranton, PA  
10—Eatontown, NJ  
11—Voorhees, NJ



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- 2) How to set up a financial policy that improves cash flow
- 3) Collecting payments at the time of service
- 4) Individual laws for your state
- 5) Collection law updates
- 6) How to overcome objections from patients
- 7) Collection tools & techniques that will have you collect more money on your very next call!

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