

Certification/Adoption Workgroup Usability Panel

Testimony

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Thank you for the opportunity to give my testimony to the HIT Policy Committee on Usability. My name is Bill Hashmat and I am a co-founder and the chief information officer at CureMD Healthcare. Since 1997, our mission has been to reduce technology barriers by providing adaptable, accessible and affordable technology for every health care provider. We take immense pride in being awarded the highest usability rating for our v 10 product line (<http://www.curemd.com/>). We feel encouraged that ONC is formalizing usability testing as part of its certification program. This formalization is much overdue.

This testimony is an attempt to construct a positive and proactive agenda for the development of HIT systems such as EHRs. We know that efficient information delivery is the key to reaping maximum benefits from our decades-long investments in developing, standardizing, adapting and interconnecting lifesaving health information. United States brings the cutting edge technology to the world and as we lead towards wide spread adoption, we must invest in not only effective, but also safe information delivery through following key investments:

Recommendations:

- Creation of mandate of comprehensive usability testing program
- Development of a common user interface
- Promotion of standardized health pathways / treatment plans
- Development of a national early intervention alerting system
- Initiation of a paper to digital conversation frame work

Cumbersome system design remains the biggest threat to The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) investments, making usability a key focus of the certification program from The Office of the National Coordinator (ONC) for Health Information Technology will ensure that our HIT investments bring the promised results.

- *What is current industry practice in testing for usability?*

No formal usability testing procedures are available in the industry; few vender organizations have active usability personnel on staff. What work is being done on usability, it is not systematic.

- *What is current industry perspective for designing systems to ensure usability?*

Industry is looking up to the government to develop and mandate usability guidelines and testing programs. Guidelines or standards with well defined performance matrix for EHRs is urgently needed

- *What is the biggest usability challenges being experienced?*

There are a number of challenges and key ones are: the majority of the systems in use are old and may not evolve easily, mass adoption drive is more profitable than usability investments for venders and unavailability of a recognized usability testing organization to enforce control and oversight.

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- *What voluntary steps can industry take to improve usability? What does the industry see as the government's role?*

The industry must involve usability experts in system design and continuously upgrade systems to embrace key findings. The government should mandate usability research, and evidence-based measurement and improvement agenda for certified programs.

Conclusion:

Health care practitioners are swamped with information overload leading to generation of serious errors and potential miss treatments. There is an urgent need to provide cognitive support to health care providers. Well-developed and tested EHRs can deliver some of this promise. It will involve enhanced information organization and better visualization instead of unorganized textual presentation – reducing the burden of effort and matching the way practitioners' process information.

Cumbersome system design remains the biggest threat to the ARRA investments, making usability testing the corner stone of ONC certification program could ensure our investments will yield the promised results and diminish the chances of EMR failures.

Encouraging vendors to adhere to and achieve certification of government set standards would increase design and development controls and will ensure a continuous control of vendor processes.