

Notes from the Rural Health Care monthly conference call: April 8, 2010

Agenda

- Recap of April 6 training at USAC in Washington, DC
 - Reminder of upcoming training at ATA in San Antonio, TX on 15 May
 - Reminder of upcoming conference attendance (AHRC and NRHA)
 - FCC Broadband Plan: What we Know
 - Summary of the Plan
 - Known Impact on RHC (Primary and Pilot programs)
 - Expected timeline
 - Links for more information
 - When will we know more?
-

Trainings and Exhibits:

- Rekha Ayalur (Program Manager for Rural Health Care) provided a quick recap of the **April 6th** training held at USAC's headquarters. We received kudos from training participant Tim Banaszak from AK who also encouraged others to attend the **May 15th** training in San Antonio, TX.
 - There was a request for more training beyond the next session at the ATA in May. RHC does plan to hold more sessions after the summer and will post a notice and send out an email when dates are finalized
- Applicants were reminded of the upcoming **May 15th** training (to attend, register [here](#)) at the ATA (American Telemedicine Association) Annual Conference being held in San Antonio, Texas. RHC will exhibit at ATA from **May 16-18**.
- RHC will be exhibiting and presenting at the ARHC (Alaska Rural Health Conference) to be held in Anchorage, Alaska on **April 28-30**.
- RHC will also be exhibiting at the NRHA (National Rural Health Care Association) conference in Savannah on **May 19-20**.

Packet Submissions:

- RHC reminded all applicants to send in 2009 packets as soon as possible. Although RHC is moving through the processing of packets more quickly than ever before, applicants were encouraged to submit their packets soon to avoid delays in processing due to the volume of packets received at the end of the funding year (June 30)

- RHC also reminded applicants and service providers that efforts continue to close out Fund Years 2006 and 2007 and all outstanding Form 467s and invoices should be submitted immediately
- Applicants will be able to post their Forms 466 and 466-A beginning on Monday, 12 April for Fund Year 2010

Broadband Plan Discussion:

- Spencer Hutchins and Tom Buckley from FCC provided background and details on the development of the [Broadband Plan](#)
- Spencer Hutchins discussed the plan, which was requested by Congress
- Mr. Hutchins recommended those on the call review at least the [Executive Summary](#) if not the entire document:
 - Discussed the need to transform industries that are behind in technology, and noted that health care is firmly in this realm
 - There is a huge opportunity to save billions of dollars, improve patient care, etc. (fully outlined in plan)
 - U.S. is not where needs to be. Too much health care still in analog. Last or near last in health IT adoption, particularly patient records, e-health (HER – electronic health records)
 - Discussed four barriers to increased usage of Broadband:
 1. Too costly or not available in many areas
 2. Lack of financial incentives for HCPs, which are paid on volume and not quality. Many issues for preventive care not funded
 3. Outdated regulation
 4. Data – how to capture data for patients and health care
 - 1. Broad band unavailable or too costly in rural areas:
 - a. Price gaps in remote areas large, worse for small providers, forcing HCPs to use more expensive solutions (ex: T-1) RECOMMENDED in the Plan (and within FCC’s purview):
 1. Retool internet access fund to bundle services, and make portions of the current Pilot program permanent with the proposed Infrastructure Fund
 2. Expand eligibility
(Ex: Long-term care facilities, administrative offices, data centers, some for-profit HCPs)
 3. Urban eligibility
(Example: serving most needy in areas with shortage of health professionals)

4. New performance measures to ensure HCPs are meeting meaningful use standards
2. Misaligned economic incentives. This is not in FCC purview so FCC can only make recommendations (we didn't capture all three on the call – please refer to the Plan):
 - a. Must change to realize e-health benefits: Partially implemented by recent health care legislation (medical home concepts). Look for areas where care is cost – effective such as Vet care (home health combo)
 3. Regulation. Designed only for face-to-face. Credentialing and licensing issues need to be resolved. FCC/FDA working together on this issue.
 4. Data :
 - a. Work on digitizing under way
 - b. Need to link clinical and research data (interoperability)
 - c. Patients need to have ownership of their medical data (access to lab data, changes/updates to HIPAA)
- Mr. Hutchins stressed that the proposed plan is not law but a strategy proposed by the FCC

Tom Buckley joined the conversation and again stressed that those on the call should review the plan, as once the NPRMs (Notice of Proposed Rule Making) are released, FCC will seek comments. He encouraged participants in the program to provide input and outlined the process going forward:

- Once the NPRMs are released:
 1. Comment period (30-90 days)
 2. Comment reply period (60 days normally)
 3. Ex parte
 4. Order establishing rules is released

Bill England cautioned that the proposed changes are not current changes. Until rules changed by Order, RHC is required to administer the program as it stands.

Note: these notes are intended to provide a summary of the discussion, but there was a lot of information presented on the call and there are likely many omissions in these notes. We strongly urge you to read the [Broadband Plan](#)'s proposal regarding Health Care, and review the just released [Broadband Action Agenda](#).