

Business

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Bush Pledges E-Medical Records For Americans

By [Roy Mark](#)

President Bush said today he wants every American to have an electronic medical record within the next 10 years, and so has pledged to increase funding next year to \$125 million for demonstration projects to test the effectiveness of health information technology.

"Most industries in America have used information technology to make their businesses more cost-effective, more efficient and more productive, and the truth of the matter is, health care hadn't," Bush said at a Cleveland press conference.

As part of the coordinated two-day publicity campaign to promote his digital health care plan, Bush said on Wednesday at the National Institutes of Health, "We've got 21st century medical practices, but 19th century paperwork system. Doctors are still writing prescriptions by hand. So there's a better way to enable our health care system to wring out inefficiencies and to protect our patients. So medical electronic records is going to be one of the great innovations in medicine."

According to the White House, most American industries are spending approximately \$8,000 per worker for IT, but the health care industry is investing only \$1,000 per employee.

A White House statement issued Thursday said, "Despite spending over \$1.6 trillion on health care as a nation, there are still serious concerns about high costs, avoidable medical errors, administrative inefficiencies and poor coordination -- all of which are closely connected to the failure to incorporate health information technology into our health care system."

While Bush was speaking in Cleveland, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) also issued proposed rules for electronic prescribing. The rules are part of a prescription drug plan for seniors championed by Bush and passed by Congress in 2003.

"The fundamental question is how do we encourage information technology in a field like health care that will save lives, make patients more involved in decision making and save money for the American people," Bush said Thursday.

Bush said he plans to build on progress already made in the health IT field by fostering regional collaborations and directing the federal government to identify and endorse voluntary standards necessary for health information to be shared safely and securely among health care providers.

The early results of the program, according to the White House, include standards for transmitting X-rays over the Internet; electronic lab results transmitted to physicians for immediate analysis, diagnosis and treatment; and standardized electronic prescriptions.

"You go to Florida, you get in an automobile accident. An electronic medical record means your data to the doc in the emergency room is transmitted just like that -- as opposed to calling somebody, getting them out of bed, could you please go find so-and-so's file, read somebody's file and transmit the information," Bush said. "I mean, you can imagine. A speedy response to an emergency saves lives."

In addition to the \$125 million the administration is seeking for IT health care initiatives in 2006, the White House also announced it is working with Congress to secure another \$50 million in medical IT funding to augment the \$50 million already budgeted for 2005.

"The role of the federal government is not only to set the strategy, but to spend grant money, to encourage the development of regional hubs and to really get the process started," Bush said. "There will be a certain momentum that will be achieved once the cost benefits become aware to everybody that's a practitioner."