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CHIME PUBLIC POLICY
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Update on New Administration

Introducing Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price, M.D.

Key Takeaway: In a party-line vote, the Senate confirmed Tom Price, M.D., to lead the Department of Health and Human Services.

Why it Matters: Secretary Price, who was confirmed Feb. 10 by a 52-47 vote in the Senate, faces a lengthy list of issues to address as the nation's top healthcare official. As Secretary, Price has authority over a budget of more than \$1 trillion and will likely play a leading role in the Affordable Care Act repeal, repair and replacement effort that will dominate healthcare policy conversations this year. And while agency heads will have direct programmatic responsibilities, Price, during his confirmation hearings, did allude to the need to rethink the Meaningful Use program. He also highlighted telemedicine as a significant innovation.

CMS Administrator Nominee to Appear Before Congress on Thursday

Key Takeaway: President Trump's nominee to lead the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) will appear before the [Senate Committee on Finance](#) this Thursday.

Why It Matters: If confirmed as CMS administrator, Seema Verma would have great influence over the future of the Meaningful Use program, the Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act (MACRA) and much of the Affordable Care Act replacement efforts.

Verma has extensive experience with the Medicaid program, known as the architect of Indiana's Medicaid expansion plan. She has also been involved in Kentucky, Ohio and Iowa Medicaid expansion efforts.

Her confirmation timeline is unclear; the Finance Committee hearing this week is just the first step toward in the process. At deadline for the Washington Debrief, no official announcement has been made about a new head at the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology.

Federal Hiring Freeze

Key Takeaway: HHS provides some details on department hirings.

Why it Matters: Questions are circling both within and outside the government on how the new, White House-directed hiring freeze will impact the healthcare sector. In a [department memo](#), Acting Deputy Secretary Colleen Barros noted that jobs needed to meet national security and public safety may be exempted from the freeze. Broadly, Barros said, this includes positions pertaining to patient care and health-related research, public health safety emergencies, those involving public health threats to national security, and critical infrastructure. The memo specifically references the healthcare sector as being a target of cyberattacks. She said that more guidance to agencies on hiring will be forthcoming.

Electronic Health Records

CMS Extends Attestation Period

Key Takeaway: The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) last week extended the Meaningful Use attestation deadline for the 2016 program year, a move CHIME advocated.

Why it Matters: Previously, CMS had announced it would extending the deadline for reporting electronic clinical quality measures (eCQMs) from Feb. 28 to March 13. However, providers were quick to note that the deadline for Meaningful Use had not been extended, making it hard to take advantage of the extension for eCQMs since the Meaningful Use portal requires those hospitals filing individually to attest they had already submitted their quality measure data. Now that the deadline has been extended for Meaningful Use as well, the situation has been rectified. For more information, go [here](#).

All Signs Point Toward a Commercial EHR Product at the VA

Key Takeaway: During a congressional hearing last week, the acting CIO at the Department of Veterans Affairs suggested that the VA should move toward a commercial electronic health record system.

Why It Matters: Congressional leaders have expressed great concern about the ability of existing IT systems within the VA to meet patient needs, clinical and otherwise in recent years.

The Acting Chief Information Officer Rob Thomas said that although he can't speak for David Shulkin, the nominee to lead the VA, he was confident the VA would pursue a commercial EHR system, replacing VistA. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) [recommended](#) that VistA be replaced.

The committee's leadership, Chairman [Phil Roe](#) (R-TN) and ranking member Tim Walz (D-MN), both urged the VA to make a quick decision whether or not to move to a commercial EHR solution.

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