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Tennessee governor urges simplicity in e-health

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NEW ORLEANS -- Tennessee Gov. Phil Bredesen today urged a simple approach that would be narrowly focused on e-prescribing for the national deployment of electronic health records.

Bredesen, speaking here at the annual Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society conference, said in his keynote speech that industry and the federal government have spent too much time trying to define the future when they should be focused on design and execution.

Bredesen, co-chairman of the National Governor's Association State Alliance for e-Health along with Vermont Gov. Jim Douglas, said e-prescribing is relatively simple and provides an immediate improvement in quality of care. Insurers and payers could help drive the use of e-prescribing by mandating its use, and the entire process could be simplified for clinicians, he said.

Last month a coalition of nine technology vendors and three major insurers formed an alliance to provide free e-prescribing services for every physician in America. At that time Nancy Dickey, president of the Health Science Center and vice chancellor for health affairs at the Texas A&M University System, said free e-prescribing software provided by the National ePrescribing Patient Safety initiative should help drive doctors' adoption of the technology.

Bredesen said EHR development also needs to focus on less complex standards, and the health care information technology industry should model itself after simple standards that underpin the Internet and the Web. Bredesen said he has downloaded and read health care IT standards and found them much more complex than Internet standards, such as TCP/IP.

Health care IT has too many standards, technical tools and pilot projects, Bredesen said. That industry should "get out of the complexity business," stop performing pilot projects and start deploying easy-to-use systems that can help reduce the country's health care bill, which stands at 16 percent of the gross domestic product, he said.

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