



- SCOTT MURRAY -

NeCST Continues to Tell Us Success Stories

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Last year at this time, we were proud to speak about CIHI's involvement in leading the development of the NeCST (National e-Claims Standard) project. Since that time, NeCST has come a long way and continues to be a success story for the collaboration of public and private health care stakeholders towards the automation of information management systems.

NeCST, simply put, is a voluntary electronic standard for the exchange of claims information between health service providers and private and public payors. Development of this pan-Canadian standard commenced in April 2000 through a joint initiative by a broad and varied group of stakeholders. As the project lead, CIHI provides secretariat support and manages key issues related to governance and funding. Canada Health Infoway also plays an instrumental role in the project as a key funder.

Perhaps the most overarching achievement of the NeCST project is that it addresses the absence of a single national electronic standard for health claims information. Currently, there are many standards being used, developed or refined in Canada, which has led to a complex and expensive claims environment. NeCST, for the first time, will bring about consistency in data capture, provide a common foundation for claims information exchange throughout the health system, and reduce the cost of managing health billings data and processing health claims and payments.

NeCST is widely recognized as one of the first projects in the world to complete the Health Level Seven (HL7) version 3 membership ballot. Over the last year, NeCST has also achieved a number of key technical accomplishments with respect to HL7. The project assisted in defining the financial classes and attributes in the HL7 Reference Information Model (RIM). This is particularly significant, as all financial (and clinical) messages in HL7 v3 are formally derived from the RIM. Additionally, the NeCST project brought forward a large array of vocabulary code sets that support approximately 40 HL7 v3 financial and clinical messages.

NeCST has also made strides in supporting a wide range of health care transactions across various areas of the health system. To date, NeCST provides messaging support for the following health care fields: physicians, pharmacy, oral health, chiropractic, physiotherapy, vision care, and preferred accommodation health providers. The final groups of messages are currently completing approval at the Committee level, and are anticipated to be fully balloted this winter.

Each of the health areas is represented within the NeCST project by a Special Interest Working Group. As the NeCST project moves towards completion in March 2005, each Special Interest Group is focusing efforts on developing a profession specific Implementation Guide to assist payors and software vendors in developing NeCST

messages.

Adoption of the NeCST standard is now under way. As reported in our column last December, BCE Emergis were the first to implement the NeCST messages for Chiropractic and Physiotherapist claims for the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board of Ontario. Also of note is a pilot project undertaken by the Opticians Association of Canada (OAC) in Alberta to implement the NeCST Vision messages. The Alberta initiative has become Phase I of the OAC launch, which is anticipated to take place within the next four to six months. Other insurers are now starting to look at the NeCST standard and how it will support their business plans. More announcements of payors and providers signing up to implement NeCST are expected in the new year.

All of these successes and accomplishments reflect the unique value of ongoing collaboration between the public and private sector, vendors and national provider associations. Certainly, NeCST continues to show growing potential, demonstrating its ability to improve data exchange and benefit Canadian health care through standardization of electronic health claims information. CIHI remains proud of the progress of the NeCST project. It is a resounding example of CIHI's commitment to taking health information further.

