Implementing Health IT… is it safe?

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Implementation of Health Information Technology is one of the few initiatives that the upcoming Presidential Candidates and Congress agree on. Both Senators McCain and Obama are proposing to spend whatever is necessary to implement Health IT during their Presidency. The Bush Administration and both candidates see many benefits to Health IT. For example, it will save the Federal government money and improve the quality of health care for patients. However, there are many obstacles to the implementation of Health IT.

To address Health IT issues, the American Health Information Community (AHIC), a federally chartered commission under the **Department of Health and Human Services**, was formed to help advance President Bush's call for most Americans to have electronic health records within 10 years. I attended a meeting of AHIC on July 29, 2008. The meetings occur about every 2 months. The topics discussed included products and approaches that consumers might use to share their personal health information. There were two panels, one representing consumers, the other industry.

Over and over again the participants addressed privacy issues. They mentioned that people are nervous about having their health records on line. The participants noted that people are accustomed to paying bills on line, but are not yet comfortable with having their ehealth records on line. Will it be possible to convince people that having ehealth records on line is safe also? Some think that Congress needs to modify HIPAA and implement stricter privacy regulations. It has also been suggested that the federal government start educating the public by using advertisements to promote ehealth records.

The current leading vendors of ehealth records, such as **Microsoft** (NASDAQ:MSFT), Google (NASDAQ:GOOG) and Dossia are working on standards for ehealth records.

Also discussed, were plans to establish a successor to AHIC as a public-private partnership based in the private sector in Fall 2008. The AHIC successor will be instrumental in drawing a road map for successful health IT adoption that promotes interoperability through strong standards, while ensuring confidentiality, privacy and security for patients.