Electronic Prescribing

Russ Thomas, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of Availity, discusses e-prescribing.

In 2008, Availity will deploy its electronic prescribing solution for providers beginning in Florida and Texas. CarePrescribe runs on a secure and reliable private network, delivering crucial, real-time prescribing information at the point of care and enabling physicians to send prescriptions electronically directly to a patient’s pharmacy of choice. The application provides access to up-to-date, patient-specific medication history and coverage, therapeutic equivalent and lower cost alternative options, and real-time drug-drug and drug-allergy interaction checks.

How does e-prescribing differ from the existing model for the prescribing process, and how does prescription information flow from one stakeholder to another?

Availity is very excited about what we are going to be doing this year in Florida and Texas. E-prescribing, overall, provides a tremendous opportunity to improve the quality of healthcare and at the same time, take some of the inefficiency out of the prescribing process. Consider the traditional process of a physician writing a paper prescription. After writing the prescription, the physician then hands the prescription to the patient; the patient walks into the pharmacy, hands it to the pharmacist and only then is it finally entered into an electronic format. The ability for a physician to write that prescription electronically and deliver it electronically to the pharmacy provides a great format for better healthcare. The prescription can be evaluated for adverse clinical reactions, adverse impacts on the patient, contraindications and duplications of therapy. This format also closes the loop of connectivity between the physician and the pharmacist. It is a great communication channel and format for healthcare providers to take better care of their patients.

What are the benefits of e-prescribing adoption to providers?

Study after study has shown that providers benefit much more from using the e-prescribing process than the traditional paper prescribing process. First, providers can see the complete histories of their patients. Hence, when they write future prescriptions, they can evaluate their decisions in the context of real, actionable information, as opposed to the information the patients happen to recall at the time. For example, a physician can check a prescription for formulary compliance to ensure that when they
send the prescriptions to the pharmacy, they will be accepted, received and processed in a timely manner. It also provides the physician a tremendous workflow advantage. Errors are often found in the traditional paper prescription process; for example, clinical problems identified in the pharmacy, noncompliance issues with formulary and contraindicated or duplicated therapy for the patients. In the traditional world, the pharmacist must stop what he or she is doing, call or fax the physician’s office and request a change in the prescription or other information. The physician then must interrupt his or her workflow and respond to that request from the pharmacy. E-prescribing eliminates that disconnect between physician and provider and significantly improves the workflow efficiency in the provider’s office.

**What electronic prescribing infrastructure (EPI) is needed for e-prescribing to succeed - particularly for the CarePrescribe application? How can this be achieved?**

E-prescribing infrastructures come in many forms. We are excited that CarePrescribe offers a single solution for our provider offices. We understand that providers have busy lives and do not have time to do evaluations of e-prescribing software and other software applications. What we are trying to do with CarePrescribe here in Florida and in Texas, is provide a single infrastructure for the physician to be able to quickly and efficiently implement an e-prescribing application in his or her office. CarePrescribe provides both a handheld application as well as a web-based application for the provider. We provide the telecommunications infrastructure, the handheld device and the software required to run those devices. Then, we do face-to-face, hands-on provisioning and training for our physician customers.

**Why should a provider choose CarePrescribe over other available e-prescribing applications? What positive impact can providers expect through the use of the CarePrescribe application?**

One of the things important to Availity is that e-prescribing is adopted across our nation. There are many good e-prescribing applications in the marketplace. CarePrescribe is our branded solution. Availity supports other e-prescribing solutions, especially those here in Florida that are integrated into the Florida e-prescribe coalition.

CarePrescribe is the branded solution that we are making available free to providers. They do not pay for any of the hardware, software or connectivity. We believe this is a great value proposition for the providers. At the same time, we recognize that sometimes, to a provider, even free is too expensive. Thus, as we went through the process of determining which application to put forth as the Availity branded solution, we looked for one that provided a good workflow process for the providers – one that would be easily understood, easily integrated in the day-to-day workflow and that could, from the first day, benefit our customers. That is why we have chosen CarePrescribe and why we believe that physicians in our marketplace will find CarePrescribe to be a great solution for their e-prescribing needs.
How does CarePrescribe improve workflow and efficiency for providers?

Generally, CarePrescribe, as well as the fundamental concept of e-prescribing applications, improves workflow and efficiency for providers. It gives them the information they need at the point of prescribing to make informed, educated decisions about the best prescriptions and medications to use for their patients, given the specific circumstances under which they are working. What we are really trying to focus on with CarePrescribe is not so much the technology that we are putting into place, but providing physicians with functional, effective tools to improve the quality of healthcare that they provide to their patients.

Can all appropriate drugs and therapies be ordered via CarePrescribe?

CarePrescribe is connected to SureScripts, which provides connectivity to retail pharmacies around the country, as well as to RxHub. It provides them the ability to order the drugs they need at the point of care.

Does CarePrescribe affect the number of medication errors and adverse drug events?

That is a great question. One of the other real benefits of e-prescribing and, of course, CarePrescribe, is the ability to provide physicians, at the point of care, with full medication histories of their patients. By doing this, we enable physicians to make informed choices at the point of prescribing, and to substantially reduce the potential for medication errors and adverse drug events.

Does CarePrescribe affect patient satisfaction?

One of the things that we really like about e-prescribing is that it is an end-to-end solution. It improves workflow and efficiency in the providers’ offices and allows them to be more connected with their patients. It also provides greater satisfaction for the patients. There is nothing more frustrating in the medical process than going to your physician, working through the process of treatment, having a medication written, walking into the pharmacy for fulfillment only to discover there is a problem with filling the prescription. When that prescription is checked against the pharmacy or health plan’s rules, the medication is not covered, requires a substitution of therapy or there is an adverse drug event that surfaces in the system and does not allow the prescription to be filled. By doing those checks on the front end - by looking at formulary compliance and the potential for adverse medication errors and drug events, you greatly enhance the patients’ level of satisfaction. When patients walk into the pharmacies, their prescriptions have already been communicated electronically and adjudicated, and should be waiting for them to retrieve.
What is the future for e-Prescribing and EHRs and how does Availity play a role?

Availity is bullish on e-prescribing, specifically as an application and electronic health record adoption. Healthcare, as an industry and sector of our national economy, has tremendous potential for improvement and enhancement though adoption of intelligent electronic systems. We think of Availity as the infrastructure for transportation of information; and even more specifically, for the transportation of healthcare data and information. What we have done so effectively here at Availity is to interlay within our regions a very sophisticated chain of infrastructure that allows health data to be communicated safely, securely and effectively. The role of Availity is to continue to promote applications like e-prescribing, that take advantage of this network that we have put in place.