



Don't Let The Cornerstones Crumble, Leavitt Says

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The secretary of the Health and Human Services Department urged his successor Wednesday to continue the department's work toward a value-driven health care system he said would help lower costs and improve care.

"Better information about quality and cost will not appear all at once, nor will the benefits of its use," Michael O. Leavitt told the World Health Care Congress. "It will happen gradually over the next decade, but we will get benefits at every step in our progress. . . . So it is with every social and economic transformation."

"We need to acknowledge we are still not very good at this yet, but we'll get there," Leavitt said, adding later, "My hope is we will see a foundation that others can build on."

Leavitt discussed his "four cornerstones" of value-driven health care: efforts to measure the quality of health care, better information on cost, broader adoption of interoperable electronic medical records and providing incentives that promote better health care. While he said progress has been made in each area, he would like the pace to move a bit faster, especially since he has just 272 days left in office.

"You can expect our urgency to continue and to see a significant number of administrative changes we intend to make to advance the cause of value-based health care," Leavitt said. One item topping the list is asking Congress to give HHS the authority to require that physicians use electronic prescribing in Medicare, language Leavitt would like to see included in legislation now being developed to stop a scheduled cut in Medicare physician payment rates.

Left unchecked, rising health care expenditures will stifle the nation's economic progress, he said. "I have no doubt that the percentage of our nation's economy devoted to health care will march forward until the weight of these expenditures brings our economic system to its knees," <Leavitt> told the audience. "There is no place on the world economic leader board for countries that spend 25 percent to 30 percent of their total output on health care. And unless we change, that is where we are headed."