

Opening Statement
The Honorable Adrian Smith (R-NE), Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Technology and Innovation
Standards for Health IT: Meaningful Use and Beyond
Committee on Science and Technology
U.S. House of Representatives
September 30, 2010

Thank you, Chairman Wu, for calling today's hearing on the development and implementation of standards and testing for interoperability of health information technology. With the enactment of the HITECH Act and other measures since our last full committee hearing on this issue in September 2007, a follow-up hearing on this topic is indeed appropriate and appreciated.

Interoperability of health IT is vital to ensuring one of the greatest benefits of electronic medical records – the ability of multiple practitioners in different locations to access a patient's medical records. This access helps avoid adverse interactions, duplicative testing, and other medical errors while improving coordination of care.

To maximize the potential of health IT, it is vital these benefits be available not just in a metropolitan area or a single state, but across state lines. For example, in my own congressional district it is not uncommon for those in need of higher level care to seek it in Colorado, South Dakota, Kansas, or Wyoming, rather than from another in-state location such as Lincoln or Omaha. It is vital electronic medical records be available both close to home and out of state.

For this reason, among others, it is appropriate NIST and other federal agencies play a role in developing interoperability standards and testing for such technologies. NIST, in particular, is a trusted arbiter of standards development and testing, and has the proven expertise to assist the Department of Health and Human Services in developing testing methods to ensure technology is interoperable as promised.

However, we must ensure interoperability standards protect private and taxpayer dollars from being wasted on technologies which are not proven to be interoperable – not as a barrier to future innovations which could further improve the quality and coordination of patient care.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman and witnesses. In particular I'd like to welcome one of our witnesses, Deb Bass, who is Executive Director of the Nebraska Health Information Initiative, based in Omaha. I look forward to a constructive session.