

POLITICO

EHEALTH WHITEBOARD

HELP leaves behavioral health out of meaningful use in bill

By **DAVID PITTMAN**

The Senate HELP Committee this morning approved a bill to reform the nation's mental health system, but Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse said he plans to offer an amendment extending meaningful use to practitioners in the field when the bill hits the floor.

That amendment would create a five-year, five-state pilot program that expands the EHR incentive program to psychologists, social workers, psychiatric hospitals, community health centers and other out- and in-patient substance abuse treatment centers.

The pilot, which Whitehouse says would help coordinate behavioral treatment with physical health, would be under SAMHSA's watch.

"To have left them out [of meaningful use] is a mistake," Whitehouse said during the markup.

His proposal was not included in the 163-page manager's amendment of the Mental Health Reform Act (S. 2680).

The legislation does direct HHS's Office for Civil Rights to clarify HIPAA for patients and providers in specific ways. Co-sponsor Sen. Bill Cassidy called HIPAA a "mess" because doctors don't know what they can and can't do under the law.

The Mental Health Reform Act also authorizes grants for telemedicine child psychiatry through SAMHSA, but Sen. Chris Murphy, another co-sponsor, said he hopes to address funding for the bill before it reaches the floor.

The HELP Committee also approved a separate bill, the National All Schedules Prescription Electronic Reporting Act (S. 480) that attempts to expand state-run prescription drug monitoring programs. It was offered by New Hampshire Sen. Jeanne Shaheen.

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