

EHEALTH WHITEBOARD

Meaningful use for behavioral health sought from HELP

By **DAVID PITTMAN**

The Behavioral Health IT Coalition is encouraging the Senate HELP Committee to include a pilot program for adding mental health providers to the meaningful use program in legislation the committee will markup next week.

The pilot, which has been proposed by Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, would extend the program to psychologists, social workers, psychiatric hospitals, community health centers and other out- and in-patient substance abuse treatment centers for five years in five states. SAMHSA, ONC and CMS would co-administer the pilot and evaluate its effectiveness.

The health IT community has struggled to add mental health providers to the meaningful use program largely because of the additional cost. Whitehouse's legislation calls for \$250 million for the pilot, but offers no way to pay for it.

Rep. Tim Murphy's Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act (H.R. 2646) initially added behavioral health to the meaningful use program, but that measure later was dropped. The president's budget proposal earlier this year also would expanded meaningful use.

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