

United States Senate

August 4, 2009

Dr. David Blumenthal, M.D., M.P.P.
National Coordinator
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Office of Health Information Technology
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201-0004

Dear Dr. Blumenthal:

Successful health care reform will secure coverage for up to 50 million more Americans who are now uninsured. To prevent this increased demand from crippling an already over-burdened health system, we must find ways to address the shortage of qualified caregivers, including technology-based solutions.

One example of this technology was developed by a small Nebraska business, Avantas. Embedded with a mathematical predictive-model, their Smart Square software has achieved an amazing 98-percent degree of accuracy in forecasting both the supply and demand side of the staffing equation. The fully web-hosted technology proactively matches staffing needs with highly skilled providers to seamlessly deliver care when and where it is required without needless transitional obstacles. Avantas can point to impressive patient-quality results and greater fiscal efficiency, as well as patient and staff satisfaction.

According to a report released by the American Health Care Association in July 2008, more than 19,400 Registered Nurse (RN) vacancies exist in long-term care settings. These vacancies, coupled with an additional 116,000 open positions in hospitals, as reported by the American Hospital Association in July 2007, bring the total RN vacancies in the U.S. to more than 135,000. This translates into a national RN vacancy rate of 8.1 percent. While the set of long-term solutions is complex and multi-faceted, Avantas' technology can help care settings immediately optimize their available nursing resources.

As we move forward with health reform, I am convinced we must include health information technology initiatives such as this to automate and better manage the scarce labor pool. As we strive to provide all Americans with health care coverage, it is crucial that our health care workforce remains robust and committed to quality and efficiency. I encourage you to support initiatives which help providers invest in information technology so that they can more effectively organize their staffing needs, and I ask you to consider using the funds available under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act for this purpose.

Sincerely,



E. Benjamin Nelson
United States Senator

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