For more information, contact:
Elizabeth West, Electronic Health Record Association Public Relations
520.730.8212 or ewest123@msn.com

HIMSS Electronic Health Record Association Supports Standards in HIT Standards Committee Testimony

CHICAGO (November 4, 2009) – The HIMSS Electronic Health Record Association (EHR Association) provided written testimony at last week's public hearing of the HIT Standards Committee Implementation Workgroup. This workgroup, which advises the Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT (ONC), is charged with bringing forward "real-world" implementation experience, with special emphasis on strategies to accelerate the adoption of proposed standards and mitigate barriers.

"We feel it is essential for the EHR software provider community to be represented in these important deliberations" said Justin Barnes, EHR Association Chairman and Vice President of Greenway Medical Technologies. "Our collective expertise, along with the experiences of our customers, in implementing standards to support the effective and secure exchange of clinical information among healthcare organizations – both acute care facilities and ambulatory care sites of all sizes – is unmatched by any other stakeholder group. Our commitment to interoperability is backed by thousands of hours and millions of dollars spent developing software, implementing and supporting standards. "

Mark Segal, Ph.D., Vice Chair of the EHR Association and Director of Government and Industry Relations for GE Healthcare IT, summarized the written statement for the workgroup during the October 29th meeting in Washington DC. "I was pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this group, emphasizing that the number one standards implementation priority over the short term is clarity and consistency on what vendors and providers are expected to implement for ARRA HIT incentives, leveraging our huge investments in harmonized standards. Segal went on to emphasize the importance of a single standard for exchange of clinical summaries, stating, "The use of the powerful and flexible CCD standard, which has been accepted by major standards organizations and federal agencies, is central to data liquidity, vendor neutrality and interoperability."

Recognizing the urgent need for clarity regarding how to implement ARRA-required standards, Segal introduced an EHR Association proposal for collaboration among several key federal and private sector organizations responsible for standards. "Knowing the enormous challenges and effort required to achieve 'meaningful use', we believe this proposal places the right emphasis on technical support and

documentation, identification of applicable open source tools, and enabling an ARRA focus for the upcoming Integrating the Healthcare Enterprise (IHE) Connect-a-thon."

"The Association has contributed to ONC's work on standards since the inception of the Health IT Standards Panel (HITSP) in 2004," Barnes went on to say. "We published the first version of our Interoperability Roadmap in 2005 based on the assumption of incremental implementation of a single standard for the exchange of clinical documents. We continue to believe that this roadmap-based approach is the right way forward for the industry."

The EHR Association represents 45 member companies who are the major suppliers of electronic health record systems in the United States. EHR Association members have worked closely with physician practices and hospitals to successfully deploy thousands of EHRs, helping their customers to improve the quality and efficiency of healthcare delivery. "Our commitment to standards is reflected in the work we do everyday with standards development organizations, ONC initiatives and our customers to ensure that the most pragmatic, flexible and vendor-neutral approach to the complex area of healthcare data and communications standards is taken -- an approach that will truly advance care delivery in the United States." Barnes concluded.

About HIMSS EHR Association
The HIMSS EHR Association, now in its fifth year, provides leadership for the electronic health record community in the harmonization of HIT standards, the EHR certification process, standards-based healthcare interoperability, and performance and quality performance reporting. Speaking with a unified voice to represent its membership and their customers, EHR Association executives have supported codification of the Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT (ONC) and an approach to standards development that builds on the framework created by the National eHealth Collaborative, the Health IT Standards Panel (HITSP) and the Certification Commission for Healthcare Information Technology IT (CCHIT). Membership is open to HIMSS Corporate Members companies that design, develop and market their own EHRs. The Association is a partner of the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS) and operates as an organizational unit within HIMSS. For more information, visit http://www.himssEHRA.org.

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