

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Behavioral Healthcare Leaders at National Summit  
Formulate Nationwide Information Management Strategy**

**Washington, D.C., October 7, 2005** -- More than 140 behavioral healthcare leaders met in Washington, D.C. on September 29-30 to begin laying the foundation for a nationwide information infrastructure for behavioral healthcare services. Participants included representatives from the major behavioral health professional and trade associations, government, provider organizations, consumers, standard-setting organizations, and business groups.

The "National Summit on Defining a Strategy for Behavioral Health Information Management and Its Role Within the Nationwide Health Information Infrastructure" was co-hosted by the Software and Technology Vendors' Association (SATVA) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). SATVA is a national trade organization whose member companies provide most of the software that helps run management and clinical operations for mental health and substance abuse agencies. SAMHSA is an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Tom Trabin, Ph.D., executive director of SATVA, said, "SATVA is proud to partner with SAMHSA in sponsoring and organizing this historic event; for the first time ever a comprehensive group of the nation's behavioral health care leaders met to plan a nationwide strategy for behavioral health information management."

Presenters included informatics experts from both general and behavioral healthcare: David Brailer, M.D., HHS National Coordinator of Health Information Technology; Mark Rothstein, M.D., Privacy Subcommittee Chair, National Committee for Vital and Health Statistics; several senior officials from SAMHSA and SATVA; data and informatics experts from the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, the National Association of State Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Directors, and the Veterans Administration Healthcare System; and other national informatics experts.

Six areas were identified prior to the Summit as essential for advancing a nationwide information management strategy for behavioral health. The Summit program was organized into intensive workgroup discussions that focused upon these six strategic areas:

- Developing and maintaining nationwide behavioral health informatics standards;
- Developing and maintaining nationwide initiatives to facilitate increased adoption of electronic health record systems (EHRs) by behavioral health services and their participation in health information networks;
- Addressing issues within behavioral health organizations to improve their implementation and effective use of information management and electronic health record systems;
- Addressing the complexities of reimbursement, regulatory and reporting requirements;
- Addressing issues for consumers and their family members and for clinicians and other service providers related to adoption of electronic health record systems;
- Facilitating interconnectivity and information exchange between mental health and substance abuse treatment and prevention, and other service systems

The workgroups generated more than 60 recommendations for consideration, many of which will eventually form the basis for a nationwide information management strategy for behavioral healthcare. While it is not possible to predict which recommendations will be advanced in the coming months, several are noteworthy:

- Behavioral healthcare perspectives should be represented within general healthcare standard-setting organizations, and all EHR and regional health information network programs initiated through HHS and its agencies;
- Behavioral health and human services should not be regarded as just another specialty, but as a field with some unique requirements for software design and information management;
- Incentives, funding mechanisms and regulatory relief should be provided to enable behavioral healthcare organizations to widely adopt EHRs;

- A public-private and broadly representative behavioral health group should be formed that can coordinate and harmonize data standard work pertaining to behavioral health care and coordinate incentive strategies for widespread EHR adoption;
- Informatics standard-setting and policy-making initiatives should involve behavioral health consumers and family members;
- The culture of provider organizations should encourage greater promotion of data-based management;
- Broad-based workforce training should be provided regarding the implementation and use of clinical software;
- Basic clinical specifications for a behavioral health EHR should be defined and serve as the core of a broader set of behavioral health-specific software certification standards;
- Legal issues should be clarified and in some cases changed to facilitate appropriate information sharing across service systems for care coordination and service improvement.

The Summit Planning Group composed of officials from SAMHSA and SATVA will meet later this month to review and prioritize recommendations from the Summit workgroups, identify existing policy-making and standard-setting committees that can advance many of the recommendations, and examine approaches for recommendations that would otherwise not be addressed within existing committees. Members of the Mental Health Statistics Improvement Program (MHSIP) Policy Group are preparing recordings of the Summit presentations, including the workgroup recommendations, for posting on [www.mhsip.org](http://www.mhsip.org) and [www.satva.org](http://www.satva.org). The Summit Planning Group will convene a meeting of the workgroup co-leaders in six months to review progress with the Summit recommendations. For more information about the Summit and its co-sponsors, contact either Dr. Tom Trabin at 510-236-6868 and visit [www.SATVA.org](http://www.SATVA.org), or Leah Young or Shelly Burgess, SAMHSA press office at 240-276-2130 and visit [www.SAMHSA.gov](http://www.SAMHSA.gov).

#### **About SATVA**

SATVA is a non-profit trade association of the leading software companies providing information technology solutions to the behavioral health and human services community.

#### **About SAMHSA**

SAMHSA, a public health agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is the lead federal agency for improving the quality and availability of substance abuse prevention, addiction treatment and mental health services in the United States.

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