

Klomp Sidesteps Confirming WISeR Will Be Expanded To Oncology, Cardiac Care

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Senate Finance Committee members say documents show CMS plans to expand its controversial, AI-driven Medicare prior authorization model to review time-sensitive medical services like oncology care and cardiac catheterization and asked HHS deputy secretary nominee Chris Klomp to explain, but he danced around the issue in written responses to lawmakers, saying any future changes will be supported by data.

In the run up to the Finance Committee vote on his nomination Thursday (Sept. 24), lawmakers sent written questions to Klomp, including several related to the Wasteful and Inappropriate Service Reduction (WISeR) model, which the Trump administration unveiled last year to expand use of prior authorizations in Medicare to reduce overutilization of services. WISeR participants are technology companies that use artificial intelligence or machine-learning to make an initial prior auth decision on certain services like pain management, nerve stimulators and skin or tissue substitutes for wound treatment in several states: Arizona, New Jersey, Ohio, Oklahoma, Texas and Washington.

The demonstration has received significant criticism from Democrats and stakeholders for the delays patients have experienced, long wait times for decisions and increased provider burden. The House Appropriations Committee has voted twice so far to keep HHS from spending appropriated funds on the demonstration, but the senate has yet to take up the measure.

Klomp was not asked about WISeR during his Senate Finance Committee nomination hearing on Sept. 15, but he was asked about it in written questions.

"Recently released documents show that CMS plans to expand the WISeR model to require artificial intelligence-performed prior authorization for time-sensitive medical services including oncology care and cardiac catheterization in traditional Medicare,"

one of the questions says. "Have providers and patients been asked about how this would affect their care? If so, what were their responses?"

Klomp answered, "The WISeR Model uses technology for an initial determination. Non-affirmations (denials) are reviewed by a licensed clinician and are not performed solely by technology."

Klomp repeated that answer when a senator said they are "concerned about the ways that AI is being used in WISeR" and when asked if confirmed will he commit to ensuring CMS reviews the AI models and protects patient privacy.

When asked directly whether the administration has plans to expand WISeR to additional states and procedures, Klomp answered CMS is "monitoring processing time, provider burden, beneficiary experience, access, clinical quality, and savings. Decision about changes to the model would be based on such experiences and findings."

One question asked Klomp what CMS is doing to ensure WISeR participants are HIPAA compliant and have policies in place that protect patient data. He said CMS is closely monitoring system performance and privacy controls so it can actively address issues as they arise

The Senate health committee is also considering Klomp's nomination. On Sept. 16, Klomp defended WISeR to Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) and said the CMS Innovation Center will soon unveil individual vendors' accounting and it has the ability to terminate participants from the program if there are issues. -- *Dorothy Mills-Gregg*
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