



## **FCC claims a role in health IT policy**

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) released its National Broadband Plan last week and, lo and behold, there was a big section that highlighted health information technology and telehealth applications.

I wasn't the only observer curious about the FCC's claim of a lead role in federal policy for health technologies. It is mostly a secondary role, as many of the FCC's recommended actions would need to be undertaken by the Health and Human Services Department and other agencies.

"What is striking is that the strong advocates for telemedicine in this administration are those involved in technology, economic development and telecommunications policy," Jonathan Linkous, chief executive of the American Telemedicine Association, told me. "Unfortunately, the health reform leaders have given short shrift to telemedicine. That is why many of the health recommendations are targeted to HHS."

What didn't make it into the FCC plan? Linkous said he would have liked to see specific recommendations for expanding Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements for telehealth and telemedicine. Nor did he see a hoped-for federal inter-agency coordinating body for telemedicine.

Another interesting point is the FCC's use of the term "e-care" to describe a variety of products and services including telehealth, telemedicine, MHealth and Mobile health. A quick search of Google reveals that e-care is by far the most popular term. However, recent budget documents issued by the Veterans Affairs Department and other federal agencies primarily have used the terms "telehealth" and "telemedicine" for their programs.

"There are many, many names attached to telemedicine: telehealth, e-care, telecare, etc.," Linkous said. "We long ago recognized that the name doesn't matter."

I'm not sure about that. One of the signs that telemedicine, or e-care, or whatever you want to call it, is maturing as an industry is that there will be basic agreement on what to call it. Until then, there may be some confusion.