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Chopra celebrates new era of entrepreneurship

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ORLANDO – The nation's chief technology officer stood before a room of health IT and business leaders Sunday at HIMSS11 and submitted what he called a "hypothesis."

Greeted with hoots and hollers of approval, Aneesh Chopra proposed that "today is the best time to be a healthcare entrepreneur in America."

Chopra – alongside Deputy National Coordinator Farzad Mostashari, MD, and VA Chief Technology Officer Peter Levin – was speaking as part of the Health IT Venture Fair & Strategic Partner Forum. He was there to discuss how the HITECH and Affordable Care Acts are driving innovation opportunities in the private sector.

Specifically, he meant to show how the government can create a better climate for market-driven health improvements through technology.

As national CTO, Chopra reports to President Barack Obama, who has enacted a three-pronged approach to innovation:

- Invest in the "building blocks of innovation," R&D and human capital, to out-educate and out-innovate America's economic competitors around the world.
- Set the right conditions for market-based innovation, catalyzing entrepreneurship through programs such as the new Startup America Partnership and via policy initiatives like the simplification of the Research & Experimentation tax credit and the modernization of the U.S. Patent Office.
- Foster an "all hands on deck" approach to R&D and standards, convening many different players to inspire new products and services.

Chopra cited recent funding for programs like the national wireless initiative and pointed to a \$3 billion innovation fund that would go after basic R&D for security and reliability and engineering to make sure "wireless communication can be fully leveraged in our healthcare ecosystem." Of that money, he said, \$100 million is earmarked for healthcare application innovation.

In addition to Startup America, a nonprofit public-private initiative, Chopra lauded programs like the "DC to VC: Investing in Healthcare IT Summit," which saw participation by the ONC and companies such as Practice Fusion and Vocera.

One recent object lesson? The NHIN Direct Project, which saw dozens of vendors – some of them competitors – working in tandem with the ONC and other parties to establish a simple and secure way to send encrypted health information between two parties.

The open collaborative – anyone was allowed to participate – was announced in March of 2010. Consensus was reached on the technical specifications soon after. Just 90 days later, the first of several firms announced they'd commercialize the spec. The program went live in January, and as of today, 50 organizations have announced their support of the Direct protocol.

"This will be," Chopra said, "one of the fastest protocols to go from concept to execution." And if the public and private sectors continue to focus on R&D collaboration and open-standards philosophy, he said, "this is the best time to be an entrepreneur."

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