

Article and Quiz for Healthcare Professionals*

Quality Data at Rest Is Quality Data In Motion

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If health information exchange was a little-known concept in January 2004, when a presidential directive launched an electronic health record (EHR) for Americans by 2014, it isn't after February 17, the release date of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA)—also known as the Economic Stimulus Law. ARRA's goal is to expedite adoption of the EHR. When implementation hits critical mass in this country, the good that can be done by moving information to the right individuals is untold. The importance of getting health information to the intersection where the patient and the provider connect is a no-brainer. Healthcare quality and patient safety desperately need improvements that electronic health information can provide, and administrative and delivery costs must be reduced. Tandem use of health information and technology is the committed direction healthcare is going.

Health information exchange is not a distant concept possible only when select people announce successful industry initiatives and models. We need sound infrastructures, robust business plans, participation agreements, trustworthy processes, and standards in many forms. However, even when each critical framing piece is in place and speed of transfer is confirmed to be dependable, the effectiveness of health information exchange only occurs if the data and information rushed to the point of care is accurate and reliable. Consider the impact of treatment decisions based on information that belongs to the wrong patient or entry errors with clinical data used during trauma treatment when every second counts. The healthcare industry cannot afford to wait for the infrastructure to perfect itself to avoid medical misadventures. The quality of information at rest will eventually be the quality of information in motion.

If a healthcare professional's typical workday involves data capture, processing, use, or viewing; treatment documentation; or even system design, that individual has an important and current role in effective health information exchange. Local diligence in putting information accuracy detail on everyone's watch at every opportunity, makes a pronounced difference in the quality of information used in the continuum of care.

Every healthcare professional is a "steward" of data quality at rest. What steps occur in your organization to ensure data at rest becomes quality information in motion? Is the responsibility to catch patient registration errors everyone's role as the patient care episode occurs? If the information of two patients with similar names is accidentally combined, can this be caught by caregivers noticing an age discrepancy between the physician's dictation and the record's identifying information? Imagine the difficulty of pulling back from distant sites the wrong health information dispersed electronically via health information exchange for a purpose it cannot meet. Not only must the error be identified before the correct information can replace it, patient care must go ahead without the documentation that might have enhanced clinical decision making.

November 1–7, 2009, Health Information and Technology Week, celebrates the progress and benefits of health information and technology working together. Each year this celebration brings the healthcare industry further along in healthcare reform and closer to ongoing patient care operations benefitting from timely, accurate, and protected health information.

Quiz:

Test your understanding of the role of quality data and information in health information exchange, its purpose, and your influential role as a healthcare professional.

1. True or False: The responsibility for high quality healthcare data and information rests with health data analysts who address quality issues through performance improvement activities.
2. Uniting health information with technology is at the core of healthcare industry changes for all the following reasons except:
 - a. Improved quality of patient care and safety
 - b. Reduced administrative costs
 - c. Threatening consumer's information privacy
 - d. Reduced healthcare delivery costs
3. True or False: A new federal law, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, progresses the healthcare industry toward the enhanced use of technology with health information.
4. True or False: When EHR system functionality is fully implemented throughout healthcare provider organizations, all types of data errors can be identified and corrected automatically.
5. True or False: Creation and maintenance of quality in healthcare data is everyone's responsibility. In the future, it may become data in motion.

Answers: 1. False, 2. c, 3. True, 4. True, 5. True