

Advancing HIE: Grants and NHIN Direct Push Data Exchange to the Forefront

Save to myBoK

By Rita Bowen, MA, RHIA, CHPS, SSGB

Recent developments have created a buzz in the healthcare industry around health information exchange (HIE), or the electronic sharing of health data across organizations within a region, community, or hospital system. HIEs facilitate access to clinical information to provide patient-centered care that is safer, timelier, more efficient, and more effective. They should be designed to assist physicians in the practice of medicine.

HIE Developments in the News

In February and March, the Department of Health and Human Services awarded all 50 states and territories grants for state HIE initiatives. The states will use the money to facilitate nonproprietary HIE that meets federal standards.

The goal of these initiatives is clear: to use EHRs to improve the quality and efficiency of care by improving the coordination and efficiency of care delivery.

The AHIMA Foundation has been working under contract with the Office of the National Coordinator (ONC) since 2006 on state-level HIE best practices. This work continues today, and you can stay informed by visiting www.slhie.org and www.statehieresources.org.

Meanwhile at the HIMSS annual meeting in March ONC announced NHIN Direct, a project to expand the standards and service definitions that, with a policy framework, constitute the nationwide health information network.

The intent is for the industry to adopt the specifications and adhere to best practices to drive a level of consistency across all implementations. Currently NHIN Direct technology specifications are under development, and a prototype is planned by the end of the summer.

You might ask how this will work with state-level or regional HIEs. Doug Fridsma, director of standards and interoperability at ONC, suggested that states and regional health information organizations serve as enabling organizations that offer services like identity management and authentication that participants may not be able to provide themselves.

Therefore, we should remain focused on guiding and assisting our organizations toward the exchange of information in a manner that is sustainable, improves patient care, and helps shape improved outcomes. Groups exchanging data should coexist as “collaborators instead of competitors.” The ultimate goal should be that groups work in addition to-and not duplicate-each other.

HIM’s Role in HIE

HIM professionals can get involved in these HIE initiatives by:

- Defining data elements to share
- Energizing and inspiring others
- Demonstrating ethics, integrity, and compliance in actions
- Assisting in defining the elusive boundaries of dissemination of healthcare data
- Innovating resourcefully
- Delivering results

When participating in HIE discussions, it is helpful to step back and see the opportunities outside of our current environments. My mother has always had the ability to find four-leaf clovers. I asked her how she does it. She said, “You got to step back and look at the bigger picture and they will just pop up to you.”

It is time we encourage our communities to step back and take a look at the bigger picture so that the concept of HIEs can better be realized.

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