Government Moves Ahead with CPR Endeavor

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Though issues about establishing an inter-departmental computer-based patient record (CPR) between the Department of Defense and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) have been on the table for a long time, real action toward a CPR began in November 1997, according to Colonel Lynn Ray, program manager of the Department of Defense's Composite Health Care System II, Falls Church, VA. The spark that ignited this action was the release of the Special Report of the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses, in which President Clinton directed the Department of Defense and the VA to create a comprehensive lifelong medical record. The project, which officially began in January 1998, is the Government Computer-based Patient Record (G-CPR).

In January, representatives from the Department of Defense, the VA, Indian Health Services (IHS), and Louisiana State University (LSU) met to discuss the major issues. The Department of Defense, VA, and IHS have long histories of collaborating on healthcare issues, and LSU, responsible for all of Louisiana state's publicly owned hospitals and clinics, faces many of the same challenges on a statewide level as the federal government does with medical records maintenance.

According to Ray, five major obstacles preventing standards for a nationwide CPR were determined at the first meeting:

- Confidentiality and security—Who will have access to what information? How are records protected?
- Business processes—How will the G-CPR be managed? What rules must be developed for implementation and data sharing between partners?
- Common protocols—What standards need to be established (i.e., HL7)?
- Common data representation—The lexicon for representing data (i.e., UMLS, ICD-9)
- Data modeling—What kind of common data model should be used?

The team looked at proposals for CPR solutions from outside vendors this summer and plans to award a delivery order this month. Ray says 1999 will be a year of problem solving within the system.

Future Goals

"If this is done the right way, it will bring about standards for a CPR. However, we want to make sure we do not create a government-only solution," says Ray. Team members hope that the G-CPR eventually becomes a standard that others can use as well. To ensure that the standards are truly universal, the G-CPR is working with the National Committee on Vital and Health Statistics, National Library of Medicine (NLM), Computer-based Patient Record Institute (CPRI), and other organizations.

From Ray's perspective, the real benefits of the project will come to light when a provider has ready access to all the information he or she needs for patient care during a patient visit. This information includes the patient history and practice guidelines based on epidemiological studies. In addition, he says that implementation of the G-CPR will further improve practice guidelines through increased accuracy and amount of data. The ultimate goals: enhancing patient care and knowledge while lowering healthcare costs. Ray says the decreasing healthcare costs will result from improved outcomes measurement and management brought on by better access to records.

Fitting the Bill

As the G-CPR does its part to move the healthcare system into the future, the need for qualified health information managers will rise. As these opportunities materialize, the healthcare system will seek out HIM professionals with the skills to stitch together the information management aspect of the CPR. To prepare for this challenge, HIM professionals need:

- data analysis skills
- data quality management skills

- clinical data management skills
- data mapping skills

But a move toward CPR will not happen overnight. "This is the right time to implement it, but it's going to take a long time to get rid of all the paper," Ray cautions. To prepare, Ray suggests keeping up with CPR-related events in the Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, NLM, CPRI, and any other organization involved with its implementation.

Resources

The G-CPR Web site describes the components and goals of the project and provides links to the project's partners. Go to http://www.gcpr.gov/gcpr/gcpr/gcpr_goalsvision_page.html.

The National Academy of Science Web site features projects on information technology and information on CPR. Go to http://www.nas.edu.

Detmer, Donald, Richard Dick, and Elaine B. Steen. *The Computer-based Patient Record: An Essential Technology for Health Care*. Revised Edition. Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1997.

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