

IG 101: Information Governance is Needed Now

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by Diana Warner

Why should healthcare organizations begin to implement an information governance program now when there are so many other pressing initiatives? The answer lies in the strategic management of information. All of these initiatives involve data and information—having an information governance program in place will support organizations in addressing the information and data components of these initiatives.

Key Drivers and Challenges

Among the challenges in healthcare are government regulations which mandate that healthcare organizations store and protect data. They must also ensure that it is readily available whenever needed for compliance audits or litigation to prevent severe penalties or higher costs. Regulations place pressure on today's healthcare organizations. Healthcare systems will need to optimize the flat or reduced reimbursements from Medicare and Medicaid. Better strategies that help mitigate the negative financial impacts of healthcare reform need to be employed in healthcare organizations.

Other drivers include:

- Privacy and security breaches that become more costly each day
- Massive update of systems, processes, and education that must be undertaken for ICD-10-CM/PCS implementation
- Trying to get the workflows and information right to qualify for "meaningful use" EHR Incentive Program attestation
- Changing payment models that make it impossible to survive without good quality clinical and financial information
- Courts are promulgating new rules on e-discovery that can prove to be extremely costly, even when the healthcare institution is not a litigant or party in a lawsuit

An information governance program will manage all the competing healthcare initiatives and help prioritize them. This will fit into the organization's need to have a plan and a strategy. Unlike most businesses and industries, healthcare is really about managing all facets of information.

With the current environment of incentives and other drivers for adoption of health information technology, there is also a need to assure the quality and integrity of healthcare information. In other words, it must be accurate, timely, reliable, valid, and complete. Healthcare organizations need to be ever-mindful of the core goals of collecting data:

- 1) Safe, effective patient care
- 2) Stable business operations
- 3) Financial viability

A leading objective organizations should hold is to transform the collected data into usable, meaningful information to drive the organization towards achievement of these three core goals. After achieving these goals, the organization can derive business intelligence from the data and information assets. Business intelligence is using, applying, and converting information assets to assist the healthcare organization in driving toward the achievement of their strategic business goals. To achieve these objectives, the information must be trustworthy and accurate. Information governance helps ensure that information is actionable.

What are the business drivers and risks and benefits?

Health organizations of all types are working to leverage the power of electronic health records (EHR). These organizations are also discovering that an EHR introduces challenges and complications—many of which relate to information governance. Done well, information governance makes it possible for organizations to utilize their EHR to support better patient care, improve patient health management, and realize greater efficiency with reduced costs. Poorly planned information governance can erode or even eliminate the benefits of implementing an EHR. There is an increasing emphasis on transparency and accountability.

Information governance provides clear policies, standards, and structures to ensure integrity and the ability to trust the information. The existence of a strong information governance program allows for the freedom of trust in the information. Without a well thought out information governance strategy, it will become increasingly difficult for healthcare organizations to meet these challenges and have the information necessary for efficient operations, as well as meeting compliance needs while controlling the significant costs of associated with managing and maintaining large volumes of information.

This is the second article in a six-part web series, [Information Governance 101](#), that discusses information governance programs and seeks to define the terms associated with information governance. The next article will discuss how an information governance program is used to achieve actionable and trustworthy information.

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