

Information Governance is Essential for Realizing the Value of Health IT

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By Lydia Washington, MS, RHIA, CPHIMS

This column was written as part of AHIMA's participation in National Health IT Week, taking place Sept. 15-19, which provides healthcare stakeholders an opportunity to promote the benefits of health IT.

Learn more about National Health IT Week [here](#).

With close to \$25 billion spent to incentivize the adoption and implementation of electronic health records (EHRs), there is a compelling need to realize the full value of this investment. As policymakers rightfully begin to shift the emphasis to ensuring that health information technology (IT) is interoperable, the focus must not only be on technical standards and business processes that facilitate exchange, but also on the quality of the very information itself. The real value of health IT will only be realized when high quality health information and data is readily available to all who need it.

However, more frequently than most would desire, healthcare organizations can still experience the old garbage in/garbage out (GIGO) phenomenon. In a 2014 [survey](#) conducted by AHIMA and Cohasset Associates, 56 percent of respondents indicated a lack of trust or confidence in the data in their organization. Further, in the same survey, only 26 percent indicated that integrity and data quality for electronic health information is mature in their organization and nearly 35 percent either did not have or were not aware of organizational metrics or protocols aimed toward improving data quality.

Clearly changes are in order to avoid or reduce the incidence of GIGO by taking a more strategic approach to information and data management. Like other valuable assets around which governance process and stewardship is placed—think IT itself—optimal information requires a solid governance framework.

Principles for Information Governance

Information governance (IG) is not only a necessity for improvements in care quality and cost reduction, but is also essential for managing and mitigating risk to the organization. It becomes a priority if organizations are to leverage data analytics and business intelligence; reduce exposure associated with e-discovery and litigation; or ensure that information is adequately protected from loss, destruction, or breach. Information governance integrates many information management functions and better positions the organization to address external requirements such as ICD-10-CM/PCS and the “meaningful use” EHR Incentive Program. It is essential for determining the “rules of engagement” associated with health information exchange (HIE).

AHIMA has developed an information governance framework based on eight essential principles for improving information management, which in turn enable the realization of the full value of technology investments. Known as the Information Governance Principles for Health Care (IGPHC), they emphasize the need to actively manage information and data throughout its lifecycle and address accountability, transparency, integrity, availability, protection, compliance, retention, and disposition of information. To the extent that an organization systematically assesses where it is with these principles and addresses identified gaps, it can improve information management and reduce the potential for GIGO.

The IGPHC are not particularly revolutionary but are frequently forgotten, overlooked, or not adequately addressed as health IT systems are developed and rolled out. Without actively applying them, it is difficult, if not impossible to realize the full value of health IT. More detailed information about how to do this is available at ahima.org.

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