Knowledge Management: Finding the Golden Nuggets

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We live in the so-called Information Age, but we should actually refer to it as the Data Age. As a nation, we are data rich and information poor.

The dilemma of holding large amounts of valuable data but little useful information is not unique to healthcare. The inability to extract useful information from existing data exists in every industry, even the airline and banking industries.

A data-to-information transition challenge exists. To meet the challenge, we must build an integrated data model to support the healthcare enterprise's information needs.

This message was clear in Kamruddin Shams' tutorial presentation, "Knowledge Management: A Future for HIM-How to Get There from Here." Shams, chairman of the Shams Group Inc., told his audience, "We are sitting on a mountain of data! It's a gold mine!" He issued a challenge to healthcare providers to deliver the right information to the right people at the right time in the right manner.

"If someone told you to go buy a gold mine, the first thing you do is hire a geologist to find some land with gold in it," Shams said. "But without the right tools to retrieve and refine the gold, all you have is a tract of land. You must have the right tools for the job."

Transforming Data into Knowledge

To address the challenge of transforming data into knowledge, Shams said, we must begin by asking "What do end users need to do with all of the data we collect?" We must also realize that there are new drivers for information, such as for business intelligence, that has become an intricate component of healthcare competitive strategy.

Before the new information-rich environment can exist, a paradigm shift must occur, Shams said. We must move from the traditional health information system (HIS) structure to one based on the enterprise-wide system structure.

The collective impetus to transform data provides a new direction for HIM. Because of our unique background and training, HIM professionals can and should be instrumental in making this transition.

We'll also need some new tools, Shams said. To be successful, a healthcare enterprise will need to develop the knowledge management (KM) based computerized patient record (CPR). The KM-based CPR will contain many of the traditional components of a health information system.

The key difference is that at the heart of the KM-based CPR lies the data warehouse and clinical data repository. This platform contains all of an organization's data in a useful standardized format in a centralized place. Data warehousing is the process of assembling and managing data that is detailed, aggregated, and summarized from various sources to support analysis and decision making.

HIM Evolves Again

In the KM-based CPR environment, the HIM professional's role must transform from managing medical records to managing the data, information, and knowledge within the record. HIM professionals will need to combine their knowledge about the healthcare industry, information technology, the enterprise competitive model, and process improvement. In this way, a new role—that of chief knowledge officer, the manager of the information and knowledge within an enterprise—evolves. This individual must lead the enterprise from its current disparate systems environment toward an integrated information/knowledge management environment.

HIM professionals already possess the essential skills needed to accomplish the task, Shams said. This includes knowledge of:

- healthcare business
- clinical aspects of healthcare
- importance of data integrity and privacy
- data sources and gathering
- data retrieval and use
- data analysis and presentation techniques

According to Shams, knowledge management will allow the healthcare industry to finally maximize the value of HIM professionals' abilities. "Knowledge management is the mind set and the process that will reveal the genius in the data," Shams said. HIM's mission is to enable the industry to retrieve the "golden nuggets" from the mountains of data.

From Old Paradigm to New

To make the most of our healthcare information, we must move from our traditional paradigm to a new one:

Old

- operations oriented
- hierarchical database
- silo based
- fragmented decision support

New

- analysis oriented
- relational database
- end user centric
- process based
- holistic decision support

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Driving the Power of Knowledge