

Prescribing a Clean Bill of Health for Data

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Ensuring data quality is not really glamorous, but it is critical," Jane Griffin, vice president of business solutions for Prism Solutions in Atlanta, GA, maintains. "And nowhere is it more critical than in the healthcare environment."

A data warehouse can be an invaluable asset to a healthcare organization, according to Griffin, who presented "Prescribing a Clean Bill of Health for Data" on October 6. It enables benefits management, physician profiling, managed care contracting, case and referral management, wellness management, and measurement and tracking of outcomes and quality of care. The usefulness of a warehouse, however, hinges on the accuracy and reliability of its data. In order to give a warehouse a clean bill of health, the data that populates it must first be "healthy." The following are "must dos" to ensure that data are healthy.

Establish Warehouse Requirements

To effectively determine warehouse data requirements, make sure that you have a thorough knowledge of the business processes supported by the warehouse. This knowledge is obtained through the activities of a cross-functional team with representatives from key business functions and hierarchical levels. At an enterprisewide or departmental level, the team identifies the high-impact processes that drive the business.

Data Acquisition

Acquiring the data to populate the warehouse may be challenging for several reasons, including:

- closed and disparate systems
- complex data
- paradigm shifts
- organization mergers
- data standardization

Data Modeling

Healthcare providers need information from numerous sources to properly care for their patients. Unfortunately, access to the information may be difficult because data often reside in disparate systems. Consequently, caregivers and healthcare executives need road maps—data models—to navigate through multiple or disparate systems to locate information that is critical to providing care.

Data Quality and Validation

Quality controls and validation begin before the warehouse is populated. These activities include establishing data definitions, values, formats, and business rules for legacy and source systems. Superior data quality will guarantee that the warehouse will efficiently and accurately drive, manage, track, and measure clinical business strategies and processes.

Gain Support

Finally, to ensure useful data within the warehouse, Griffin's recommendation is to secure a team of users from across the enterprise to determine data warehouse requirements. This, along with executive-level ownership for data quality, will help guarantee the success of enterprise data quality improvement efforts and will ensure that the data captured is truly the data needed to provide information for key processes driving the business.

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