Updating Long-Term Care's Health IT Course: New Road Map Outlines Goals for the Next Three Years

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Senior citizens consume more than fifty percent of healthcare services and dollars in the US, and the first baby boomers are only just beginning to enter the market.[1] Both the opportunity and necessity for health IT in aging services has never been clearer.

Technology offers the opportunity to deliver services in innovative ways, improve quality, and improve communication for shared care and transitions of care. Meeting the anticipated needs and demand of senior citizens requires that the long-term care (LTC) community take initiative. Stakeholders at the 2008 Long-Term Care Health Information Technology Summit outlined health IT goals for the coming three years.

LTC Health IT Progress to Date

The focus on aging services and LTC health IT began in 2005 when thought leaders and stakeholders in post-acute and long-term care met at a summit to create the first road map on LTC's priorities for the coming months. Over the subsequent three years, activities focused on identifying a shared vision, increasing awareness of the need for health IT in aging services, getting involved in standards activities, recommending certification of EHR products, and calling for an increase in research.

The cornerstone for mapping progress is the annual Long-Term Care Health Information Technology Summit, which focuses on key priorities and action items, progress made over the year, and upcoming plans. Summit organizers include representatives from more than a dozen associations in aging services, long-term care, and home care that work together to further health IT and EHR adoption.

Significant progress has been made on the action items from the 2005 road map, which included:

- Formalizing a cross-organizational collaborative to mobilize the LTC community on health IT and EHR issues
- Advocating for and identifying funding mechanisms and incentives, including IT use in pay-for-performance programs
- Seeking opportunities to participate in the efforts of health IT standards organizations
- Advocating for and adopting data content and messaging standards that support a unified language and promoting interoperability across care settings
- Adopting a standardized patient transfer or summary of care document as a step to coordinate care across settings and reduce risk to the patient
- Developing implementation guidelines for existing standards
- Prioritizing e-prescribing and medication safety initiatives
- Researching and benchmarking EHR and e-prescribing initiatives
- Certifying EHR and e-prescribing solutions
- Linking quality initiatives to health IT, the EHR, and e-prescribing

Updating LTC's Health IT Course

This past summer the summit produced a new road map for 2008–2010. The road map documents the specific progress made in each of the above action items, identifies new action items for the next three years, and charts 35 different research initiatives. Some of the initiatives include the following.

Strengthening cross-organizational collaborative. Collaboration by the major stakeholder associations has proven to be essential in making progress on the action items from the road map and advocating the importance of including LTC on emerging

national policies. For the next three years priorities include a continued plan for hosting the annual Long-Term Care Health Information Technology Summit, creation of a sustainable model for the collaborative, and formalizing a process to include new stakeholders.

Increasing the consumer-focused approach to quality initiatives and health IT, EHR, and e-prescribing. This action item spearheads further exploration of a consumer-centric approach in long-term care, including incorporating consumers into the annual summit and calling for more research between quality and resident outcomes and the use of health IT. As senior citizens enter the aging services spectrum they must be educated on the value of health IT and EHRs and be encouraged to take responsibility for their wellness, assisted by personal health records.

Advocating for and identifying tools to support provider adoption and implementation of EHRs. The first road map focused on increasing awareness and getting LTC engaged in industry activities. With the foundation in place, priorities for the next three years include conducting an adoption survey, promoting the use of certified EHR products, focusing on critical education for EHRs and health IT, advocating for funding and incentives, and identifying tools to support adoption and implementation.

Prioritizing e-prescribing and medication management initiatives. In 2005 thought leaders at the summit identified e-prescribing as a critical stepping stone to a fully functional EHR. Significant progress has been made in developing the standards infrastructure that enables e-prescribing to move forward.

The 2008–2010 road map calls for the LTC community to continue promoting the use of critical standards; support Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Drug Enforcement Administration, and state agency initiatives to remove barriers to adoption; and expand the electronic order initiatives and capabilities.

Certifying EHR and e-prescribing solutions to reduce risk. Stakeholders recognized that certification of EHR and e-prescribing systems can reduce the risk of investment for LTC organizations. Over the past two years the LTC community developed a standard for EHR system functionality for LTC facilities and successfully advocated for the Certification Commission for Healthcare Information Technology to include LTC in its certification plans.

The 2008–2010 road map recommends that the long-term community continue the progress by continually working with the commission, providing LTC expertise on certification work groups, and advocating for expanding certification to home care.

Demonstrating interoperability using emerging standards. The focus on health IT standards over the past three years has been beneficial in identifying important initiatives and engaging LTC participation. The new road map moves the standards efforts from seeking opportunities and building standards to incorporating and using standards to demonstrate interoperability.

Activities for the next three years focus on promoting the use of standards, encouraging vendors and providers to participate in interoperability demonstrations or connect-a-thons, supporting the development and use of a continuity of care document for transfer of care, and hosting an interoperability showcase at the 2009 Long-Term Care Health Information Technology Summit.

Encouraging further research investigating relationships between health IT, quality, and outcomes across the full spectrum of aging services and care. Significant progress has been made in the call for research for aging services and health IT. A number of studies are identified in the 2008–2010 road map. Each study provides important information on practices, recommendations, and benchmarks that expand the expertise of the LTC community.

The priority for the next three years is to continue advocating for research that focuses on the link between quality and outcomes and health IT, addresses the issues of consumers, and promotes wellness and disease prevention.

Note

1. AHIMA. "A Road Map for Health IT in Long Term Care: 2008-2010."

Reference

AHIMA. "A Road Map for Health IT in Long Term Care." December 2005.

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