

## Building Health Care Value Through Health Information Technology

Virtually every industry in America has embraced the efficiency and quality improvements offered by information technology, from educators who communicate with students and parents via email, to retail stores that electronically track merchandise in real time. And yet, most of our nation's doctors are still writing prescriptions with infamously illegible handwriting and tracking critical patient health information with paper files. Patients themselves also resort to a hodge-podge of paper-based information when managing their own care. Health care is one of the few industries still wedded to paper, making care delivery slower, more error-prone and harder to measure and coordinate than it should be.

### The Prescription Drug Example

*Consider these facts:*

- Roughly 65 percent of Americans use prescription drugs, with more than three billion prescriptions written annually.
- Four out of five patients who visit a doctor's office leave with a hand-written prescription.
- Pharmacists make 150 million calls to doctor's offices to clarify prescriptions every year.
- Americans experience more than 3 million adverse drug reactions every year, many of them life threatening and caused by human error.
- If every doctor used electronic prescription technology that alerted them to possible adverse drug interactions and ensured that prescriptions were accurate, we could prevent nearly 1.3 million medical visits.

*Many Americans are getting sicker from the very treatments meant to make them better because we have not invested in health information technology to help providers deliver better health care value.*

### Health Information Technology Can Improve Patient Care

If doctors and other providers have good information at their fingertips, they can provide better care for their patients. Similarly, if patients have good information at their fingertips, they can better manage their own health. For example, an electronic medical record enables physicians to more quickly assess whether a patient with diabetes has received each and every procedure in the recommended standards of care. Or, if a child suffers an injury and his pediatrician is unavailable, another doctor could tap into his electronic medical file to learn whether vaccinations are up-to-date. And, electronic medical files allow information to move with patients – an important feature in our

highly mobile world. For example, if a person has an electronic medical card that travels with them or if a person's medical history is accessible online to care providers, then in an emergency, doctors have the information they need to deliver the right care.

### Health Information Technology Can Improve Provider Performance

Computerized health information makes it easier to collect and measure health care quality and resources used so we can help providers improve, and reward those who do a better job. Having health information in computerized forms allows us to see more clearly what treatments work and what don't, and allows providers to effectively coordinate patient care and track outcomes.

## What's Needed? Standardized, Affordable Health Information Technology

We need basic standards for health information technology so the market can design systems that can meet the needs of many types of providers, communicate with one another, provide good data for performance measurement, and still protect the privacy of patients. We need to help make information technology affordable and available for providers in low-income communities, so every patient can benefit.

## Where to Start?

There are real solutions that can begin to address the need for rapid adoption of standard health information technology. Some examples include:

- Reward implementation of health technology through pay-for-performance initiatives.
- Reimburse providers for electronic consultations with patients.
- Give patients the opportunity to receive electronic versions of their medical files, even as PDF copies of paper records, and the power to have those files transferred between providers by email.

## About Building Health Care Value

As the debate on how best to reform our broken health care system continues, many can agree that the current system covers too few, costs too much, and does not deliver consistently high-quality care. This document is part of a series seeking to focus our discussion on how to ensure patients receive quality, affordable care. Without ensuring quality, access to care may be meaningless. Without addressing costs, care becomes inaccessible. By building health care value into reform measures, we can ensure that Americans get the right care at the right time.

### Where to Learn More:

- "California Performance Measurement and Health IT Landscape," report by Pacific Business Group on Health for California HealthCare Foundation. [http://www.pbgh.org/news/pubs/documents/CHCF\\_CalifPerfMeasLandscape\\_08-2006.pdf](http://www.pbgh.org/news/pubs/documents/CHCF_CalifPerfMeasLandscape_08-2006.pdf)
- National Resource Center for Health Information Technology, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) <http://healthit.ahrq.gov/>
- "Accelerating U.S. EHR adoption: how to get there from here. Recommendations based on the 2004 ACMI retreat" by B. Middleton, W.E. Hammand, P. Brennan and, G.F. Cooper. *Journal of the American Medical Information Association*, 2005; 12:13–19. <http://www.jamia.org/cgi/reprint/12/1/13.pdf>

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