

Tools, Education Factor into Future Health Information Technology Adoption in the Ambulatory Setting

The healthcare industry and federal government are assembling tools to help doctors embrace health information technology in their practices. But, as the panel of experts engaging this topic at the Alliance's annual meeting also acknowledged, the typical physician is still freezing in her tracks when faced with the oncoming wired world.

Achieving return on investment should not be a concern for physicians. HIT adoption in the physician practice is a cost of doing business today. On the other hand, according to James Morrow, vice president and chief information officer of North Fulton Family Medicine, ROI is often a collateral benefit as physicians gain the required outcomes of higher quality, fewer medical errors and more lives saved.

Getting physicians into IT's front door, however, takes more than an "it's the right thing to do" philosophy. Doctors have fundamental questions that need to be answered, ranging from how to ensure patient privacy to what to look for in an electronic system.

More vendors and increasing options in the ambulatory setting are providing concrete solutions. Mark Leavitt, chairman of the Certification Commission for Health Information Technology, noted that vendors at all revenue and size levels are achieving certification of their products, so physician practices have a breadth of options to work with in the marketplace.

Interestingly, most vendors that fail the certification qualifications do so on the privacy requirements, regardless of the size of their company. The rigorous nature of privacy certification is reflected in the sometimes multiple attempts vendors must make in the certification process before hitting the required level of privacy safeguards in their technology.

Physicians, then, can be assured on this point when they acquire HIT for their practice. But a more basic roadblock remains: Doctors often simply do not know what they're looking for, or looking at, when they consider a purchase of technology, be it a computer, an e-prescribing tool, or an electronic health record system.

Although a number of physicians are serving as champions of ambulatory health IT adoption, the critical mass of physicians on the front lines are not picking it up. A member of the audience shared that physicians have a "deer in the headlights" reaction when they actively investigate computer purchasing.

Consider e-prescribing. According to Kevin Hutchinson, president and chief executive officer of SureScripts, the operator of the Pharmacy Health Information Exchange, one factor holding up adoption of this technology is that while 95 percent of chain pharmacies are certified with PHIE and are live on its network, only 20 percent of independents are live. When physicians cannot be assured that their prescriptions can be ordered electronically, they face an obstacle that transcends the technical and process issues of implementing IT in a practice.

Education is one key to bringing physician practices to the adoption side of the HIT equation. Michael Mochomovitz, MD, president and chief medical officer for University Hospitals Medical Practices and the University Hospitals Management Services Organization, urges the healthcare industry to "start physicians early, in

medical school, teaching them on electronic systems rather than with paper-based charts and prescription pads.”

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Ambulatory Health IT Adoption: Different Angles, Different Options

Panelists: Kevin Hutchinson, President and Chief Executive Officer, SureScripts
Mark Leavitt, MD, PhD, Chairman, Certification Commission for Healthcare Information Technology
James Morrow Jr., MD, Vice President and Chief Information Officer, North Fulton Family Medicine
Michael Mochomovitz, MD, President and Chief Medical Officer, University Hospitals Medical Practices and University Hospitals Management Services Organization

Moderator: Dennis Weaver, MD, Interim Chief Medical Officer, National Alliance for Health Information Technology