



Regional Healthcare Initiatives:

Overcoming Barriers to Success

By Ward Keever, CTG HealthCare Solutions Executive Director of Executive Services

The past ten years have seen a growing interest in establishing regional healthcare initiatives for the purpose of exchanging clinical and financial information among regional health care related entities to enable a variety of initiatives including:

- Improving healthcare and patient outcomes
- Addressing HIPAA regulations and leveraging such to reduce operational costs for providers and payers
- Promoting clinical research and regional economic development

The participating members have included a variety of entities including academic institutions, hospital systems, physicians, home health organizations, payers, governmental agencies, and various other entities.

Early efforts have been less than successful due to several basic flaws in the approach taken by the various regional consortiums, including their consulting company partners. However, interest remains high as attention has been drawn to the national level with the appointment of Dr. David Brailer, as well as expressions of interest from President George Bush, former House speaker Newt Gingrich, Senator Ted Kennedy, and other national figures.

The barriers to success are varied depending upon the goals of the collaboration, and should be considered when developing consortium goals and objectives and the associated governance model. The creation of an overall strategy and the subsequent tactical planning should consider the following historical impediments:

1. Lack of ongoing funding source: Once grant funding comes to an end, historically there has not been an alternative source of funding identified to support the continued exchange of information to support the initiative.
2. Patient control of personal medical records: Health information is a very confidential subject. Some people have no concerns, while others are very protective of the disclosure of their health record. The choice regarding disseminating what and to whom must be controlled by individual patients and is often inadequately addressed.
3. Physician participation: To date, regional initiatives have demonstrated little value to physicians. To gain their support, the initiative must facilitate physicians' practice of medicine and not require physicians to pay for the exchange of information.



As part of CTG's Executive Services offerings, CTG has assembled a uniquely qualified consortium of CTG experts, as well as a few carefully-selected vendors, to address each of these problems and provide solutions. CTG is prepared to address the regional healthcare initiatives in phases throughout the continuum from strategy development through implementation and support. Each phase is uniquely designed to demonstrate value and success upon which to build subsequent phases and enduring success.

4. Culture: Historically, technology has been represented as the 'holy grail' for achieving success in a regional health information network. But in fact, it is first necessary to address cultural issues, and to assure that they do not overcome the advantages that technology can provide.
5. Medical record inclusiveness: When a person receives care from multiple caregivers (hospitals, physicians, and other facilities) within a region, it is most likely that he/she will be identified by multiple identification numbers: i.e., indexes. This can often be true for a person within the same care-giving organization. Knowing that these multiple records exist, and providing access to all of the records within a single patient record, has been both problematic and expensive to solve.
6. Access to medical information outside the region: Many individuals travel beyond the scope of the regional initiative. For these persons, there must be a methodology in place for caregivers to 1) know information is available and from where, and 2) how to access this information quickly at no cost.
7. Implementation speed: It is important to provide results as quickly as possible in order to maintain interest in the project. Long drawn out solutions will cause early sponsors to lose interest before demonstrating meaningful results and the opportunity is lost.

The initial focus of a successful regional collaborative must begin with a clear vision and development of a strategy that promotes a focused, phased approach. The appropriate alignment of goals and objectives across participating members to enhance synergies and minimize cultural differences is essential for success. Such success has to be clearly defined with realistic metrics for evaluation to effectively guide implementation and governance over time. Once the vision and strategy are clearly understood and consensus has been gained by all members, the tactical planning can proceed to design and implementation of the required technology enablers. A regional initiative can significantly increase its opportunity for success by understanding the success and failures of past regional efforts to develop a clear understanding of the critical success factors for today's regional collaborations.

For more information or discussion, please contact Ward Keever at ward.keever@ctghs.com.

We will be at the CHIME Spring Forum and HIMSS. Please visit us at our HIMSS booth #4915. We hope to see you there!