

Healthcare in desperate need of IT revolution

BY BARRY P. CHAIKEN, MD, *BearingPoint, Inc.*

MAYBE MICHAEL MOORE in his film *SICKO* overstates the case, but we are receiving rather poor value from the close to 17 percent of GDP we spend on healthcare. Unless we fundamentally change the roles of physicians, nurses and other healthcare professionals in the delivery of care and aggressively embrace health information technology, the United States will continue to rank at the bottom of developed countries on every meaningful metric used to measure access to quality healthcare.

Revolution is defined as a “drastic and far-reaching change in ways of thinking and behaving.” Our healthcare system requires a health information technology revolution, a drastic change in the way we deliver care by utilizing IT in new and innovative ways. Deploying IT, to replicate the processes and workflows that currently deliver our poor results on so many measures, only guarantees continued suboptimal and unacceptable outcomes.

FOCUS OF REVOLUTIONARY IT

Revolutionary healthcare IT requires a focus on three key areas: 1) information technology tools, 2) processes and workflows, and 3) healthcare provider tasks, duties and responsibilities.

Solutions come from an in-depth understanding of tools, and creative thinking around what each healthcare professional can do and how best to deploy the individual skill. Valued solutions offer these professionals healthcare IT tools that leverage their unique skills, while organizing the processes and workflows to deliver a consistently high quality, safe and efficient healthcare outcome.

Inherent in revolutionary IT is the need for change; change in what professionals do and how they do it. Therefore, effective change management techniques must be utilized to facilitate the acceptance of the new processes and workflows, in addition to any new responsibilities and duties.

Clinical decision support at the point of care plays a significant role in revolutionary healthcare IT. Through such tools, best practices, those that we know from scientific evidence offer the highest probability to produce the best healthcare outcome, can be delivered to each patient by healthcare professionals educated, guided, and “double-checked” by the IT tool.

UNRELIABLE DELIVERY SYSTEM

Currently patient delivery relies upon an unreliable system formed from poorly integrated and highly variable human parts. Revolutionary healthcare IT solutions provide needed support tools that increase the reliability of the human components, while integrating these components through effective processes and efficient workflows. In addition, as best practices change, they can efficiently be delivered through the existing workflow by simply changing the knowledge contained in the clinical decision support tool. In the current state without revolutionary IT, changing practice patterns requires the inefficient, and often ineffective, method of targeted medical education.

Revolutionary IT fundamentally changes



Barry P. Chaiken, MD

what physicians, nurses and other healthcare professionals do. Physician activities become more challenging on a cognitive level as other routine tasks such as drug dose recall, use of best practice order sets, and drug-allergy checking become automated. Physician

“Deploying IT, to replicate the processes and workflows that currently deliver our poor results on so many measures, only **GUARANTEES continued suboptimal and **UNACCEPTABLE** outcomes.”**

expertise is assigned to more important tasks including solving difficult diagnostic problems, devising customized patient treatment plans, and influencing patient adherence to chronic disease care regimens.

Work for nurses and other healthcare professionals changes dramatically too. More tasks, formerly done by physicians or healthcare specialists, are completed by these professionals guided by intelligent processes and workflows that include meaningful IT.

Revolutionary healthcare IT provides all clinicians with more meaningful and skill-appropriate tasks. In addition, patients receive more consistent and higher quality care laced with fewer medical errors.

ROI REQUIRES PATIENCE

For those who are squirming to see return on investment, it is important to be patient. Across many other industries that deployed IT, a lag period occurred where the quality

and costs savings did not appear. As frustrating as this period was, companies that continued to invest in IT slowly began to experience the jumps in productivity and profit that were long expected. Each organization reached a tipping point where processes and workflow evolved to take advantage of the new IT tools to deliver unprecedented results.

To look at the benefit of IT on these companies in isolation is to miss the true lesson to be gained from their experiences. Early on, the deployment of IT was viewed as the solution. Only after companies recognized it to be just a tool, did they formulate the real solutions based upon revised processes and workflow that provided much of the benefits. This is what our healthcare industry must do today.

For information technology to play a valuable role in reducing healthcare costs while enhancing quality of care, it must be deployed in a revolutionary way that completely reinvents how care is delivered, professionals provide the care, and technology is leveraged throughout care delivery. Without such a revolution, the billions of dollars currently being spent on healthcare IT will sadly be wasted. ■

MORE AT HealthcareITNews.com

 **Connect** E CHAIKEN 1107

Barry P. Chaiken, MD, MPH, associate chief medical officer, BearingPoint, Inc. has more than 20 years experience in medical research, patient safety and risk management. Chaiken is board certified in General Preventive Medicine and Public Health as well as Health Care Quality Management. Chaiken is a board member and a Fellow of the Health Information Management and Systems Society (HIMSS).