

If not us, then who?

BY BARRY P. CHAIKEN, MD, FHIMSS

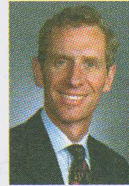
U.S. HEALTHCARE costs 50 percent more per capita than in any other country. Quality of care trails that of most OECD countries. The ranks of the uninsured make up close to 1/7th of the population. Unless there is revolutionary transformation of the delivery of healthcare in the United States, our people, economy and country will suffer severely. We can no longer afford the poor outcomes and high costs of a healthcare delivery system that provides unacceptable value from the resources expended.

Transformation comes through the smart, creative implementation of health information technology. It requires the forming of multidisciplinary teams of experienced experts, with broad and deep knowledge, that develop the solutions necessary to bring about change. If it is not we, the professionals working on every aspect of health information technology, then who will lead this transformation driven by health IT?

OBJECTIVES OF HEALTH IT

The objectives of using health information technology are four fold: 1) Enhance patient safety, 2) Improve quality of care, 3) Foster greater accessibility, and 4) Facilitate a reduction in medical costs. These objectives must be tackled together rather than separately to construct solutions that achieve revolutionary changes rather than

small incremental successes. Healthcare delivery functions as a closed system, where actions taken in one sphere impact the others. Therefore, enhancements in quality must take into account costs. Improvements in accessibility must be tied to increased efficiencies and patient safety. Acting alone with focus on narrow niches is no longer a credible approach to utilizing information



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technology to enhance clinical care.

So how do we reap the benefits of health information technology? The answer is best represented by three words: flexibility, creativity, and tenacity.

Flexibility – Health information technology simply provides a tool for transformation, nothing more. Its value is derived by how we wield that tool as represented by our process redesigns, retooling of workflows, and strategies for deployment.

Creativity – It is not enough to just be flexible. Flexibility invites creativity to conceive of those new ideas and innovative approaches to

problems that transform the way we do things and the outcomes we achieve.

Tenacity – As clinical care is both complex and uniquely personal, transformation is far from easy. The enormous complexity of healthcare guarantees there will be false starts, stumbles, and crushing failures. Things that are difficult always play out this way. Therefore, we must display an unrelenting commitment, a level of tenaciousness that systematically attacks every problem, through flexibility and creativity, to achieve the desired transformation.

Healthcare reform legislation cannot transform healthcare. A \$19 billion investment in electronic medical records cannot transform healthcare. Government, payers, health IT vendors, clinicians, hospitals, and IT experts cannot transform healthcare. Yet, organizations and professionals, working synergistically together while being flexible, creative, and tenacious, will transform healthcare.

Again, if not us, who? No one, so let's get going. Our country is waiting.

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