Regional Health Information Organizations

Written by Dell Public

Introduction
The federal government is pushing for a national health information network [1], and regional health information organizations (RHIOs) are considered the precursors to such an initiative. If healthcare organizations can begin to implement electronic health records systems and cooperate to store and share their data on a regional basis, overall patient care can be improved and the move to a national network can be more manageable. However, many organizations are constrained by budget and even those RHIOs that have been started are in the early stages of formation and face significant barriers to widespread use.

The main roadblock is due to the fact that the concept of RHIOs depends on disparate health care stakeholders-hospitals, group practices, payers, employers and public health agencies-cooperating to build an I.T. infrastructure to support the local sharing of data from proprietary information systems. This sort of cooperation is difficult because the key stakeholders often are direct competitors, or as in the case of providers and payers, have a history of rocky relationships. However, it can be accomplished and the benefits can be far-reaching.

EHRs before RHIOs
The first step in creating successful RHIOs is for individual organizations and practices to adopt Electronic Health Records (EHRs) since paper records and data cannot be easily shared with other organizations in the region. For your organization, an EHR may not only help prepare you for participation in an RHIO, but it can also help improve overall efficiency and accuracy in patient care. A well-run system can:

- Save time
- Prevent medical errors
- Provide doctors with up-to-date patient histories and
- Put clinical information and best practices in physicians’ hands at the point of care.

Additionally, an EHR can actually help save money in the long run by automating billing and reducing overall staff time and the need to outsource.

Why an RHIO?
Despite the benefits of EHRs, many physicians still do not believe there is a business case for implementing them. However, the benefit comes from the ability to provide better care and it is multiplied when it's made a part of an RHIO. While this is reason enough for most organizations to adopt EHRs and become a part of an RHIO, there is yet another positive effect. When patient records are freely exchanged, healthcare can improve and patients return as satisfied customers.

Patients appreciate providers who have a full grasp of their medical histories, and they feel more comfortable about their providers and the treatments they recommend. In addition, patients appreciate providers who do not order duplicates of costly tests they may have received at another facility. Minimizing the patient's out-of-pocket expenses is obviously critical in today's era of rising healthcare costs. Ultimately, RHIOs help ensure that patients can be more satisfied and engaged with their providers.

Get Started
For more information on EHRs, RHIOs and how Dell can help, visit the Healthcare Solutions Center or call our healthcare professionals at 1-800-822-8143.

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