

## Experts Diagnose Health IT's Impact on Your Care

**DIGITAL HEALTH** From the future of the Affordable Care Act to the implications of telehealth, an expert panel surveys what patients can expect from our evolving health care system these next few years.



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#### What's an advancement in health IT that's improved patient engagement?

We have to consider the emergence of telehealth, as a method to deliver health care remotely. Telehealth can provide support to a patient or physician anytime, anywhere with the use of today's standard mobile technology or video conferencing.

From the comfort and convenience of a patient's home, a patient can consult with a health care provider, receive primary care, or follow-up care. For some patients it is simply a convenience; for others, it is essential to receiving timely quality care with earlier intervention, better follow-up and quicker resolution of problems. For the patient who is homebound or in a rural area with no local health care, removing barriers to receiving care can have a very large impact.

One of the greatest benefits of telehealth is empowering patients to take a more active role in their own health care. In one of HIMSS' own surveys of clinical and IT hospital personnel, telehealth / audiovisual solutions ranked highest in patient satisfaction of seven connected health tools included in the survey. Several payor organizations now reimburse providers as if a telehealth session was an in-person visit.

While in its infancy, use of telehealth is expected to grow rapidly, accelerated by new technologies and more patients demanding the convenience associated with virtual visits. We recognize the importance of promoting patient engagement and the role telehealth can have in facilitating virtual care through live video, audio and text message consultations. Clearly, the future includes telehealth becoming routine as a means to deliver high quality care at a lower cost.

#### What do you believe is the biggest obstacle facing the health care industry?

This is a very timely question, as we have just undergone a transition to a new administration and congress aiming to repeal the Affordable Care Act and replace it with a new yet unclear plan. Although there is uncertainty as to what reform will bring, we believe that the transition to value-based reimbursement with better patient

outcomes at a lower cost will most certainly continue to be a primary objective. This is evidenced, in part, by the Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act of 2015. One result of the shift from volume- to value-based reimbursement is the consolidation of health care systems and practices, presenting additional challenges around interoperability.

Value-based reimbursement, to be effective, requires the collection of large amounts of data and communication between multiple sources, from wherever the patient has been to wherever the patient will be, potentially in multiple health care systems. With health care IT data historically in silos across systems, collaboration and coordination of care faces significant hurdles, such as viewing patient data in a unified manner. Furthermore, with the ubiquitous adoption of electronic health records, physicians are demanding all patient data, including images from all sources, be available centrally in the EHR.

### **What role can health care IT play in overcoming this?**

The health care IT industry continues to advance technologies that support interoperability and increase adoption and collaboration across disparate IT systems — both within and across health care systems. Enterprise solutions, whether in a large, integrated delivery network or in a small community hospital, are required. As an example, solutions could entail making all images and patient data available in a central archive across systems with a universal viewer. This means fast access to large imaging files without pre-fetching, and enhanced cybersecurity, as no data is transferred or stored on workstations.

### **What do you see in store for the industry five years down the road?**

The future of health care IT will bring significant enhancements to the health and well-being of the population in general, with many advancements coming to fruition in this timeframe. Of significance, will be precision medicine and management of population health, based on not only data analytics but also on new forms of data from health care technology still in development or not yet conceived.

New technologies have the potential to advance precision medicine. One in development is High Sensitive Tissue Testing (HSTT), which utilizes proprietary fluorescent nanoparticles to identify varying patterns of proteins from cancer cells. The ability to pinpoint the location and the intensity of the cancer proteins distinguishes HSTT from other cancer diagnostics. By monitoring changes in the patterns, treatments can be developed that are individualized and match a patient's own characteristics. Precise imaging diagnostics, along with rapid accessibility to critical health care data, will contribute to the advancement of precision medicine while also advancing the state of health care IT.

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