

Thursday, October 15, 2009

Health Care Issues

Two afternoon sessions covered health care reform. Posing the question, "Can Information Technology (IT) save the health care crisis?" four panelists debated the benefits and complexities of converting the nation's medical records systems from paper to electronic form.

Paul Peabody, recently retired vice president & CIO of William Beaumont Hospital, was adamant that the health care industry cannot eliminate waste and fraud without good IT systems in place.

Still, he recognizes many challenges. "The American Recovery and Reinvestment ACT (ARRA) will have \$900 billion flowing to hospitals and physicians over the next 10 years to adopt electronic health records (EHRs)," he said. "Right now, only 17 percent of doctors and 10 percent of hospitals have basic EHR's. Since the ARRA money serves as an incentive, but does not cover the complete cost of startup, cost remains an issue. It also requires a process change. If you put a good system on top of a bad process, you get bad results faster, so change management is critical."

Michael Ubl, executive director of the Minnesota Health Information Exchange, agrees the IT solution is necessary to standardize health care practices. "Our biggest problem is that we are fragmented. The many stakeholders involved have little incentive to work together. It's not about whether technology will work or not. It does. It's about a new paradigm. It's about doing right by the patient. We need to have adequate information in the doctor's hands when the patient is in his office. We must agree we won't compete on the data itself."

SUMMARY

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