

HEALTH CARE

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Health Care: News and Information is a service of the Healthcare Leadership Council (HLC) to help our readers stay fully informed about the latest health care issues as we work to advance a high-quality health care system.

Jim Edwards, Editor

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Health IT a Tool for Advancing Health Care

Health information technology is already paying off in improving care and cutting costs.

- Mary Grealy, president of the Healthcare Leadership Council, recently shared health leaders' perspective with the U.S. House Ways and Means Health Subcommittee.
- The subcommittee held a hearing on promoting the adoption and use of HIT. Ms. Grealy provided a statement for the hearing record.
- HLC told Congress that the nation's health care leadership "strongly supports HIT and its ability to increase the efficiency and safety of care."

As early adopters of the new technology, HLC members have experienced "firsthand the many benefits" that "improve health care quality, outcomes and patient safety."

- One institution has run an electronic health records system for five years. It connects three hospitals, 463 doctors, a home health agency and a medical research arm.
- Some 50,000 patients can now "schedule appointments online, refill prescription drug orders, and communicate with" their doctors.
- This EHR system has halved the time getting inpatients their first dose of antibiotic. HIT has cut the organization's medication error rate by about 80 percent. HIT has helped this provider reduce hospital infections by 70 percent.
- Technology has played a major role in integrating the delivery of medication. HIT has helped cut bedside IV medication errors. HIT "ensure[s] that the proper patient is receiving the proper drug, in the proper dosage, after the proper precautions are taken."

Another HLC member has put HIT to good use. It's integrated care, lowered costs and improved quality.

- This EHR system links 5.5 million patients, 11 hospitals and 13 health centers.

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- More than 145,000 patients in that system now use a special online tool. They can review doctor instructions, ask for appointments or renew a prescription.
- Doctors benefit from safety-oriented online decisionmaking tools. Professionals collaborate electronically in caring for each patient.

Health IT must be part of achieving gains across health care, such as measuring performance and facilitating research.

- HIT has tremendous potential in measuring "the efficacy and efficiency of health care delivery." This becomes all the more important as policymakers move toward payment for performance, not just volume.
- Interoperability standards can support quicker, more complete aggregation of data for measuring safety and quality.
- Federal authorities can oversee public and private interoperability initiatives. These help different HIT systems to "speak the same language." The areas for focus include "commonly accepted clinical definitions, vocabulary and terminology."

Health leaders are bullish on HIT's role in America's health care. Key goals in the near future include promoting more widespread adoption, "incorporating HIT into the subject matter of medical education," and balancing vital information-sharing with appropriate patient records confidentiality. Steering a right course in these waters is vital if American health care is to remain a world leader in research and innovation, as well as expanding HIT's role in wellness and chronic disease management.

The Healthcare Leadership Council, representing the innovators in each sector of the health care industry, is committed to advancing a market-based health care system that values innovation and provides affordable, high-quality care.

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