Future of Healthcare IT

HIMSS CEO Hal Wolf says health reformation is upon us and we all must prepare

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Innovation, Collaboration Is Key

The health care industry needs innovation and new technologies to progress. Medicine, marketing and technology thought leader John Nosta says communication among the industry's leaders is critical.

John Nosta is trilingual: He speaks medicine, marketing and technology.

The speaker and columnist for Forbes and Psychology Today is a technology theorist. Here, he weighs in on what is needed to continue advancing innovation in digital health care.

How did you get started in digital health care?

My background is in science, and I was a research associate at Harvard Medical School where I published several papers on heart attacks and sudden cardiac death. I found that medicine in the traditional sense was not for me.

Where do you think innovation in health care technology will flourish in the coming year?

We’re seeing the emergence of data analytics for insight on care and diagnosis, and treatment modalities. I believe the conversion of data is the new currency of health and wellness.

Where should health care professionals be shifting their attention to most benefit consumers?

It’s an adoption sequence — innovation isn’t a switch you turn on and off. What we need is a more collaborative dynamic that physicians, caregivers and health care providers are a part of so they can all engage in technological change.

Melinda Carter

Why “Going the Distance” for Your Patients Is a Win-Win-Win

Edward Marx
CIO, Cleveland Clinic

Peter Rasmussen, M.D.
Medical Director of Digital Health, Cleveland Clinic

Change in any industry has hurdles but health care providers should embrace a digital transformation. Here’s why:

Digital health is transforming health care delivery. Like many other health care systems, Cleveland Clinic is seeing a rapid increase in the use of virtual visits to deliver patient care — a 163 percent rise in 2017 alone. In fact, we expect that in five years, half of all outpatient visits will be virtual and up to 25 percent of in-patient days will be handled in the home.

By offering distance health technologies, we are responding to patients’ needs for better care, greater convenience and improved access to our services. An early adopter of telehealth, Cleveland Clinic has expanded virtual visits into multiple areas for both acute and chronic conditions.

Meeting patients where they are

Providing distance health technologies for the right patients, in the right place and at the right time enhances patient experience and quality of care. It works well for routine follow-ups, including postop checkups, medication checks, screenings and general issues. It is a win-win-win for patients who enjoy the accessibility, lower costs and even the “cool” factor.

Virtualizing the practice of medicine drives value where it makes clinical and economic sense. It can reduce costs, such as by curbing unnecessary ED visits. Telemedicine-enabled visits can increase physicians’ efficiency in the era of bundled payments.

For providers, connecting with patients through virtual visits is easier than meeting in person, and reviewing medical records and imaging online is simpler. A virtual approach gives health care providers a broader reach and more frequent touchpoints with patients.

Accepting change

The transition to distance health has hurdles but they are surmountable. Reimbursement has been an obstacle but now that Medicare pays for virtual visits, other insurers are getting on board.

Virtual care requires behavioral changes and some physicians may not be as willing as others to adapt. However, if the organization as a whole supports and encourages the transition, additional providers will come around.

This is only the beginning for distance health and, as digital health technology advances, we are eager to see how it continues to make a difference for patients and health care professionals alike.
Envisioning the Future of Health Care Through the Eyes of a Health and Tech Reporter

CNBC reporter Christina Farr says the health care industry is an interesting one to watch with technology and start-ups shaping its future.

What advice would you give health care technology start-ups?

Don’t assume that you’re the first person to have that idea. There are a lot of problems to be tackled in health care, but there are also reasons why they haven’t been solved already. Network with those who have tried and failed. At the very least, you’ll probably learn something about the pitfalls to avoid if you continue down the challenging path of starting a health-tech company.

How are health care institutions benefiting from shifting toward technology?

Health care institutions are finally waking up to the idea that they should care about the needs of the customer. Some of them are reacting to potential competition from Amazon, which is notoriously consumer-centric, while others are reacting to recent trends, such as the rise of high-deductible plans. Technology can help them as they start to offer more tools for transparency, appointment booking, check-ins with patients and so on.

What is something you would like to see in 2019 within the health care tech industry?

More transparency from the big technology players, including Amazon and Alphabet, about what they plan to do in health. I’ve enjoyed reporting on their internal projects, but I’d like to see them speak out more about why they’re interested in the sector and what they hope to accomplish.

Is there anything else you’d like to add about the health care industry, upcoming trends or your experiences for industry leaders to know?

This year, 2019 will be the year of the employer. Last year, we saw the formation of alliances like Amazon, Berkshire Hathaway and J.P. Morgan to take on some of the biggest problems with health care from an employer standpoint. Employers are increasingly becoming fed up with the status quo, and, unlike the average consumer, they have a lot of money and power at their disposal to do something about it. Watch this space.

UIC Is Leading the Way in the Future of Health Informatics

At the University of Illinois at Chicago’s acclaimed College of Applied Health Sciences, the future of health data is improving patient outcomes today.

Data is the future of everything, including health care — in fact, it’s predicted that health care will be impacted by the rising volume of data more than other industries.

“Consumer informatics is a hot area right now, and it’s going to be even more intense in five or 10 years,” says Anthony Faiola, Ph.D., head of the Department of Biomedical and Health Informatics at the UIC College of Applied Health Sciences. The college is a component of UI Health, UIC’s academic health enterprise, which consists of seven health sciences colleges and the University of Illinois Hospital and Clinics. The college’s health informatics master’s program — the world’s first accredited online program of its kind — is ranked third in the country. Its Ph.D. program in biomedical and health informatics is the first of its kind in Illinois.

Influencing the Industry

Faiola is happy to brag about the scope of research within the department. “Our faculty are developing mobile health technologies for the self-management of chronic diseases; improving patient safety through communication and care coordination; and advancing our understanding of the intersections between health informatics and health data, and data visualization and health care design. Some are conducting hardcore health data analytics — data simplification to improve clinical outcomes.”

The program is incredibly influential. “The big impact that we’re having right now is in education,” says Faiola. “We are among the largest health informatics programs in the country.”

In addition to transforming the present and future of health care, the department is preparing students for future success. “After completing the program, I was promoted to vice president of IT at my current employer,” says Pam Landis, a 2012 master’s graduate.

There’s no arguing with the data. “Established over 15 years ago, we’ve produced many health informatics professionals who are having a significant impact on the health care industry,” says Faiola.
From HIM Coding to Project Design, Health Care IT Partners Need Many Skills

Technical health care projects require consultants to provide much more than technology expertise. That’s the cost of delivering best-possible patient outcomes.

Health care organizations turn to technical staffing providers for one of two reasons:
1. To fill a skills gap on their technical team
2. To help them through a period of change, like when updating their electronic health record system

Currently, the second reason is the most common due to the rapid rate of technological advancement.

If technology expertise was the only requirement, any IT consultant could support a health care project. But health care organizations also have much larger concerns — complying with regulations, managing costs and, most importantly, delivering the best possible patient outcomes.

Every technical health care consulting project must not only focus on the technology itself but also on how the technology is used each day to deliver quality health care services.

Therefore, technical staffing partners provide health care organizations with more than just technical experts. Project teams may include experienced consultants who can support project design, change management and training, in addition to possessing the required technical know-how.

Technical staffing partners may also deliver advisory services, interim leadership, health information management coding skills, audits and compliance reviews, and cybersecurity guidance to help their health care clients use technology to effectively manage and optimize patient care.

Vanessa Whitehead, Vice President, Healthcare Business Development, Oxford Global Resources

How Organizations Can Prepare for the Health Care Reformation

Health care is stepping into the 21st century and this company is helping patients everywhere make sense of the transformation.

Health care is undergoing a period of transformation unlike anything the industry has ever experienced. It is the same disruptive, technology-enabled shift that has been changing industries like banking, travel and transportation over the past decade. A perfect storm of other factors are collectively disrupting the status quo — health care expenditures are continuing to considerably outpace GDP growth.

Modern problems
In the United States, an estimated 11,000 people per day are reaching the age of 65 (the “silver tsunami”), with increasingly complex and chronic care needs that, in many cases, are simply the result of longer life expectancy. Consumer demands are growing ever louder, as the patient experience with the health care system moves away from episodic interactions and toward an ongoing, connected relationship.

These factors are fundamentally changing the way health care is delivered. Organizations are coping with these rising costs and increased demand levels by consolidating to gain economies of scale, but this potentially impacts competition and choice.

While these changes often lead to more questions than answers, one thing is certain: health reform is upon us and we all must prepare.

Modern solutions
Fortunately, the industry is realizing the capabilities of digital health tools that facilitate better patient experiences, and reimagine care delivery, making it more efficient, convenient, globally diverse and safer.

For example, with today’s telemedicine solutions, physicians can video conference with patients who may be in rural or overcrowded urban areas without access to nearby care. Internet-connected wearable devices can help detect potential health problems and monitor chronic conditions. Individualized care is being bolstered by the incorporation of precision medicine tools that use sophisticated data analysis. The possibilities seem endless.

In today’s digital world, technology extends health care outside the physical walls of our hospitals and doctors’ offices. The experience of receiving care suddenly becomes more seamless and personalized.

Championing health care modernization
For nearly 60 years, the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society has championed solutions to the challenge of managing information and technology, always with the goal of realizing the full health potential of every human. We believe it is our responsibility to equip the industry with the expertise and resources to support the best possible decisions regarding technology strategies, and steer the industry toward the horizon of health reformation.

Today’s champions of health may be mere mortals but they are nevertheless heroes in the fight for better health care. Every champion plays a crucial role in moving health care toward a brighter future, one that harnesses the power of information and technology to deliver better care for every patient.

Hal Wolf, President and CEO, Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society

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When Clinical Documentation Is Timely and Accurate, Patient Care Improves

Quality care requires consistency and accuracy across a patient’s health record. This is where health care facilities should turn to improve their documentation.

Clinical documentation in the health record is at the core of health care — it tells the story of a patient’s journey through the health care system. Ensuring this information is accurate is essential to quality patient care.

Within health care, data is limitless. Whether it is clinical, administrative, financial or patient-generated, the need to manage that data efficiently is now more important than ever. New electronic data capture methods, such as mobile health apps, patient self-monitoring, wearable devices, patient portals and health information exchanges, have led to a dramatic increase in the ways health care organizations acquire patient data for use in the electronic health record (EHR) — increasing the need for clinical documentation improvement/integrity (CDI) programs.

Consistent record
The purpose of a CDI program, which most U.S. acute care facilities have, is to initiate concurrent and, as appropriate, retrospective reviews of health records for conflicting, incomplete or nonspecific provider documentation. These reviews usually occur on patient care units, in outpatient clinics or are conducted remotely via the EHR.

The diagnoses and procedures documented in the record need to be clearly supported by clinical indicators so the codes assigned are accurate, resulting in quality data reporting and accurate reimbursement. Complete and accurate clinical documentation is also essential for disputing denials and receiving appropriate reimbursement. Providing quality patient care is the most significant outcome of improved clinical documentation.

Quality documentation
A lack of adequate clinical documentation is a problem throughout the health care industry. Coupled with low health care literacy, this can produce ineffective care plans that patients cannot maintain.

While high-quality documentation is always sought, it remains uncommon within most health care settings. CDI programs are the bridge between a host of institutions, such as health care, case management, coding professionals, quality management and financial services.

To ensure high-quality clinical documentation that can be trusted, organizations must also have data and EHR integrity. Documentation and data content within an EHR must be accurate, complete, concise, consistent, timely and universally understood by data users. Both structured and unstructured data must meet a standard of quality if they are to be meaningful for internal and external use, especially for the continuum of care. Factors such as ease-of-use and design of the EHR can facilitate adherence to documentation guidelines and standards.

Health information management (HIM) professionals are trained extensively in clinical documentation requirements, EHR implementation and management, and data quality practices. Health care facilities should be looking to the HIM professionals within their organization to ensure high-quality patient care through managing the integrity of the documentation, EHR functionality and access, and data quality.

Melanie Endicott, Vice President, HIM Practice Excellence, American Health Information Management Association
Industry Experts Say the Future of Medicine Puts a Focus on Customer Experience

Artificial intelligence and virtual intelligence are at the core of the user-focused future of health care, according to our panel of industry experts.

How can advancements in health IT help combat physician burnout?

Steve Gerst: New, natural language processing and office-based virtual assistant technologies are now coming to market. This will allow physicians to focus directly on the patient while generating electronic medical record notes, suggesting treatments, ordering tests and querying the system for related conditions.

Bill Rogers: Today’s nurses, physicians and other providers routinely perform mundane tasks, which limits their time with patients. Voice- and chatbot-powered virtual assistants can provide a streamlined experience by automating many of these tasks.

Annette L. Valenta: By advancing interoperability, improving human-computer interaction design, reducing unintended consequences of computerized physician order entry, tackling disruptive workflow and adapting to the new computer-physician-patient triad.

What advice would you give a health care professional looking to implement new technology?

SG: Health care professionals should learn to take advantage of new technologies as they become available. This includes AI, genomics, proteomics, telemedicine, and any technology that will make their lives and practices more efficient.

BR: Futurists see a bright outlook for AI-driven conversational interfaces. Today’s most digitally savvy health care organizations are engaging people conversationally for next-gen digital marketing, member services, population health and beyond.

AV: Health care technology is implemented within complex adaptive sociotechnical systems, influenced by external forces, and encompasses the organizational structure, people, hardware/software and the tasks themselves.

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