Improving Patient Care Through Health Care Connectivity

❎ On October 9, the Brookings Institution hosted an event which focused on opportunities and obstacles regarding health care connectivity and how any barriers can be overcome to promote an interoperable health care system.

Panelists included Kelly Cronin, director of the Office of Care Transformation at the Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT (ONC), Tara Koslov, deputy director of the Federal Trade Commission's Office of Policy Planning (OPP), Simeon Schwartz, president and CEO of WESTMED Medical Group and Niam Yaraghi, fellow at the Governance Studies and Center for Technology Innovation at Brookings. The discussion centered primarily on what businesses are doing to promote electronic sharing and connectivity across the health care space and the complications that delay implementation.

Cronin drew from her experience working on the ONC's interoperability roadmap and noted that while more organizations seem to be implementing a query model to allow providers to find and/or request information on a patient from other providers, this does not represent true connectivity and that a much more robust model remains necessary.

WESTMED has been paperless since 2002 and Schwartz noted that they have seen dramatic improvements in hospitalization numbers, cost reduction and easy transfers for patients, but noted that it was an expensive task. Schwartz argued that not all data is created equal, but that parsing the different information and prioritizing claims data is vital.

CNSI sees the value in paperless resources and developed its own myHealthButton mobile app to promote connectivity between

patients and providers. By using a connected infrastructure, health care companies are able to more efficiently gather and organize data in order to produce more informed decisions and diagnoses for patients along with better quality care.

While the benefits of a connected system are obvious, there are significant barriers to implementing interoperable systems. These can include technical, legal and workflow difficulties, but the panelists widely agreed that the financial hurdles are the most complex issue hindering organizations from moving towards connected platforms.

Yaraghi noted that some physicians still don't believe in these health information exchanges (HIEs) and that even if they did, implementation is still difficult due to workflow issues. He noted that recent efforts to get organizations to adopt HIE are focused on financial incentives, but that we need to instead produce research which confirms their value and shows how providers and physicians will benefit from implementing these systems. He said that by using incentives as a way to continue to push the use of HIE, we should expect the market to pick up these platforms once they understand how beneficial they can be.

Cronin noted that addressing these barriers will require the federal government and the industry to work closely together. We will need more monitoring and advocacy work to get where we need to be, mentioned Koslov, and the ONC and FCC will need to work together to set widely accepted standards that enforce these changes.

While there are obstacles that prevent a completely connected health care system, it does not mean that we have not, and will not, continue to make progress. When asked what the conversation surrounding health IT connectivity will look like in two years, the panelists envision similar advances: all towards a more widely accepted interoperable system that matures quickly.

Where do you see our health care system in two years? Tweet @CNSICorp to let us know!

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