Concerns Arise Over ONC Departures – Is The Future Of Interoperability Really At Risk?

National Coordinator Karen DeSalvo and Deputy National Coordinator Jacob Reider recently announced their respective departures from the Office of the National Coordinator of Health IT (ONC). DeSalvo's decision to step down as National Coordinator to serve as Acting Assistant Secretary for Health and support the Obama administration's Ebola response effort has created buzz among industry organizations.

Since she took over her role as National Coordinator only ten months ago, DeSalvo focused on the importance of interoperability, calling it the ONC's top priority. Now, industry groups are voicing concerns that the departure could hinder the progress towards these interoperable infrastructures.

The American Medical Association (AMA) expressed worry that the recent departures are creating a "leadership gap" which is putting the agency's progress in addressing interoperability at risk. In a statement published by the AMA, the organization's President Robert M. Wah notes that, "Interoperability and data portability are critical components for transforming clinical practice and improving health outcomes…Without widespread interoperability, the value proposition of EHRs has not been realized and the adoption of new innovative models of care has been hindered."

On the other hand, some organizations, including the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS) and Health Level Seven International, have applauded the

transition and DeSalvo’s decision to support the national response to Ebola.

Carla Smith, executive vice president of HIMSS North America, assures that progress will continue to be made, noting that the organization is excited to work with new Acting National Coordinator Lisa Lewis to “address the many issues facing the Office of the National Coordinator and the health IT community.”

Meanwhile, in a blog post co-authored by DeSalvo and Lewis, the two confirm that DeSalvo will keep her role as the chair of the Health IT Policy Committee and continue to work on high-level policy issues and lead the development of the interoperability roadmap. Most importantly, the two address these industry concerns and argue that “the team that is ONC is far more than one or two leaders.”

Do you think the ONC departures are creating a leadership gap? Tweet @CNSICorp to let us know!

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