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Information: Too Much, Too Little, or Just The Right Amount?

Cardiologists, department managers, and system executives have a bevy of data at their fingertips—from congestive HF readmission rates to the most recent EKG reading for the next office visit. The challenge is not an inadequate amount of available data, but rather having the right health information at the right time in order to deliver optimal care. How effectively data is managed, shared, and utilized across the care continuum is a clear indication of how informed an organization truly is. This column is the next installment in a series outlining the five core attributes of a value-based enterprise. In combination with being integrated, scaled, rationalized, and responsive, being an *informed* organization is essential for successfully transitioning to a value-based environment.

The Right Information at Every Level

Health systems and the cardiologists they support have more information available to them than ever before, but *more* data is not, in many cases, synonymous with the *right* data. Gorging on data or, conversely, failing to take advantage of pertinent and readily available data leads to wasted opportunities, ineffective processes, and uninformed decision-making. Informed organizations have a keen awareness of what they need to know now and in the future, while possessing the infrastructure to acquire and manage the continuous flow of information. They also have a clear vision for converting relevant data into actionable information. Pertinent health information needs to be made available to physicians at the point of care *and* administrative information is needed at the system level to make critical organizational decisions—and there are several levels in between.

To simplify, let's take a look at some examples of why having the right information at the right time is pivotal in supporting patient care, business operations, and service line strategy.

- **Supporting Patient Care** – I've had numerous conversations with cardiologists around the topic of care coordination and continuity, and the information that's necessary to achieve this. For instance, cardiologists repeatedly tell me

that when it comes to post-acute care follow-up visits, they want the discharge summary, EKG, and list of relevant medications from the hospital, and that this information be readily accessible in their electronic health records. Instead, they're spending considerable time sifting through the patient's medical record and discerning the pertinent information from the "noise." Additionally, information now comes from a cornucopia of sources (i.e., devices, other providers, patients, and patients' families), making the management and sharing of data ever more complicated, yet ever more urgent. Informed organizations support physicians' ability to deliver optimal care by putting the processes and systems in place that provide them timely information where they need it.

- **Supporting Business Operations** – Moving from clinical decisions to department operations, the goal of gathering and analyzing data revolves around evaluating operational performance. This data should align with the specific information needs of practice and/or department managers. For example, dashboards have become a common vehicle for presenting data—often related to patient satisfaction, revenue cycle, quality elements, staffing efficiency, and operating costs—in a visually compelling and digestible way. However, many dashboards today look like airplane cockpits. Instead of simplifying and distilling the information needed, the amount of data, indicators, and targets tend to camouflage the most salient statistics operations managers need to make key business decisions. For data to become information that produces operational improvements, it must first be manageable. Instead of a cockpit, operational dashboards should more closely resemble the dashboard of your car, clearly highlighting the 3-5 most relevant statistics or performance indicators.
- **Supporting Service Line Strategy** – As we elevate the discussion to the system level, informed

organizations and leaders are better positioned to develop immediate and long-term strategic plans and effectively execute these plans. Health systems are under intensifying pressure to possess the knowledge necessary to acclimate to payment reform and the transition to value, as well as integrate services across the care continuum. Attempting to meet these demands without the appropriate intelligence and a clearly defined strategy for doing so will bury an organization. Service line growth, as well as physician recruitment and retention, are prominent goals in the strategic plans of many organizations. Thus, improving access to health services is a priority for organizations as they look to increase their patient population and market position. In designing strategies to expand geographic reach and patient access, for example, some sophisticated organizations are doing ZIP code and utilization analyses to assess how far patients are traveling to receive certain clinical services. This information is then being used to design strategies for reaching underserved populations, such as telemedicine programs, without having to build a physical office or convince providers to travel to distant locations.

A Complex, Crucial Pursuit

Being informed is a foundational attribute for a thriving value-based enterprise. From a high-level understanding of drastic shifts in the payment environment to a strong grasp on local market dynamics to the utilization of organization and patient-specific data sources, cultivating and maintaining an informed organization is no small feat. But it is a crucial one. In order to successfully make the transition to a value-based environment, it's essential that organizations recognize and respond to the need to provide physicians, department and practice managers, and system leadership with the right information at the right time and in the right place. ■

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