

TECHNOLOGY NEWS

IN HEALTH CARE

LTC Plays Key Role In HIT Transformation

Leadership, Shared Vision Integral To Progress

Enhancing the quality of long term care through health information technology (HIT) is decidedly possible, but it requires cooperation and interoperability with all sectors of health care, according to BearingPoint, a management and tech-

fragmented; deals with a wider spectrum of health care issues; provides a wider range of services for seniors of varying levels of cognitive and functional status; faces greater workforce and financing challenges; and, compared to the rest of the health care system, has been slower to adopt technology,” the report says.

As a result, long term care is the ideal “poster child” for the cause of technology-enabled transformation in the entirety of the nation’s current health care discussion, BearingPoint says.

The document includes detailed descriptions of how each of the

six areas of change envisioned by NCQLTC—culture transformation and empowering individuals and families, workforce, technology, regulation, and finance—are facilitated by HIT.

For example, electronically enabled communities of practice and other forms of social networking, online educational programs, the raising of expectations through quality reporting, and outcomes transparency are listed as several examples of how HIT can enable culture transformation in long term care.

Information technology offers many opportunities to address long term care workforce challenges as well. The report offers strategies for HIT’s role in ameliorating the workforce crisis,

nology consulting firm, in a recent report that examines the role and potential of HIT in long term care.

Prepared for the National Commission on Quality Long Term Care (NCQLTC), the report offers strategies and recommendations for effectively addressing the impediments to widespread adoption of HIT in long term care.

“Essential But Not Sufficient: Information Technology in Long Term Care as an Enabler of Consumer Independence and Quality Improvement” proposes that long term care can serve a special role because it intersects with so many levels of health care.

“Long term care tends to be more



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including the concept that it can help make data collection, documentation, and reporting more efficient and more accurate, thereby freeing up resources to provide care.

In addition, the report notes that the “constructs of social networking technologies lend themselves to extending the capabilities of the long term care workforce by reducing or delaying demand, connecting resources to needs, and keeping seniors and their caregivers connected and informed.”

Among the 15 recommendations offered in the report, one calls for wider support for the development of innovative technologies and the adaptation of existing technologies.

“The challenge lay in identifying prospective technologies and alerting product developers and investors to their existence,” the report says. An example is the National Aeronautics and Space Administration’s development of remote monitoring technol- ➤

ogy for space shuttle flights that will also be used to provide mobile osteoporosis screenings at retirement communities and nursing facilities.

Another method to stimulate innovation is to publicly recognize advances in long term care technology by academia, technology vendors, and others by

creating a presidential medal similar to the National Medal of Technology administered by the National Institute for Standards and Technology, the report says.

Telemedicine and its reimbursement can be best addressed through regulatory reform and professional licensure

enhancements, the report says. “The regulatory hurdles impeding the use of telemedicine and its reimbursement need to be addressed in order to fully exploit this method of care delivery.”

The pursuit of sustainable funding models that accelerate the adoption of HIT in long term care is another recommendation offered in the report, which points to the significant lag time between the time HIT investments are made and the time benefits begin accruing. Revolving loan funds that have been successful models in other domains such as local transportation development and environmental issues could be adopted for long term care HIT investment. “Such a method could create a sustainable source of capital for investing in the HIT infrastructure,” the report says.

Also noted are numerous policy, economic, and legal barriers that may discourage innovation and adoption of HIT in long term care. “One economic barrier, for example, is the ‘valley of death’ for financing that occurs after the phase of research where the capabilities of the technology are proven but a marketable product has not yet been developed and commercialized.” Other barriers include the liability risks involved in creating products for seniors with chronic illnesses and serious disabilities and the lack of standards that support interoperability and market confidence.

To that end, the report suggests that identifying, analyzing, and understanding the social, economic, and political dimensions of these barriers must be undertaken before recommending and pursuing strategies for removing them.

BearingPoint acknowledges that the current state of HIT in long term care “represents an unprecedented opportunity for the leaders in long term care to demonstrate the collective vision and fortitude and find the means to invest in a coordinated, shared infrastructure for moving our entire health care system into the 21st century.”

—Meg LaPorte