Build Trust with Your Health IT Supplier

Develop seamless systems that deliver functionality and efficiency

By David Reitzel

Quality patient care includes harnessing technology to provide efficient, cost-effective care. To achieve this, the tech and healthcare industries need to work together to develop, for all stakeholders, seamless technology that delivers on promised functionality. Close collaboration and a growing trust relationship between IT technology and providers is necessary to get the job done. The starting point is an assessment of performance of key benchmark and improvement opportunities.

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The entire U.S. healthcare ecosystem is roiled by accelerating waves of change, led by the rising tide of consolidation. The consolidation comes in many forms, both actual and virtual. It includes mergers and acquisitions, shared business models, and information-centric consolidation that has been enabled by advances in clinical and administrative systems, personal health records, mobile devices and health information exchanges.

At the root of this trend is growing trust in the underlying information, IT and business process infrastructures—as well as heightened confidence in the privacy, security, accuracy, reliability, scalability and performance of these systems and technologies.

While it is imperative that each system and business process deliver on its promised functionality and efficiencies, those benchmarks alone will not move the needle on improving the quality and price of healthcare. Those outcomes can be achieved only when the systems in play interact seamlessly to support all constituencies of the new healthcare ecosystem—providers, payers, patients, pharmaceutical companies and regulators.

Healthcare IT suppliers are uniquely positioned to assist clients in realizing the benefits technology brings to healthcare and to help instill a sense of trust in the systems and processes that underpin quality care.

The elements of trust

For hospitals to successfully leverage IT, they must work in collaboration with their healthcare IT suppliers. Customer concerns must be understood, and strategies must be developed to address those concerns. A good place to start is conducting a bottom-up assessment of performance around key benchmarks and identifying areas for improvement.

- *Privacy* – Can hospitals rely on the system to protect their information? Does the system meet expectations for privacy? Is the data secure, and is it being used for its original purpose?

- *Transparency* – Can patients and hospitals see how the information is being used and how the system operates?

- *Reliability* – Will the system work and is it scalable? Is it secure? Most hospitals can no longer afford to manage their own data centers, but assessing third-party custodians can be a challenge. Does that third party meet the specified standards? Can the hospital effectively manage the third party? Is any protected health information stored in the cloud properly protected? Hospitals are being increasingly measured and paid by performance outcomes, but is the performance data monitoring accurate?

- *Access* – Participants need a system they can access 24/7 in real time. Hospitals require this access for care and business purposes, and patients want it for personal reasons, including such needs as technology running remote monitoring devices. Access in extended networks must be reliable and accurate, and at the same time, be secure. From the standpoint of a healthcare IT supplier, access often runs counter to privacy concerns.

- *Supply chain provenance* – As more treatments occur outside of hospitals, healthcare networks are expanding. Patients are using home monitoring systems and wearable devices, and acute-care facilities, labs and other outlets are plugging in from remote locations. They are part of the network from an economic and delivery standpoint, but they are not direct owners in the system. As the industry consolidates and companies attempt to combine systems, integration issues can quickly compound.

- *Governance* – With different regulators and jurisdictions overseeing systems, healthcare IT suppliers often face overlapping or contradictory policies that need to be rationalized.

Building blocks to establish and maintain trust
After the assessment uncovers where the existing system falls short, providers and payers can set healthcare IT suppliers to work on creating an effective technology infrastructure.

Healthcare IT suppliers should be expected to capitalize on these opportunities to satisfy the full range of customer and marketplace expectations:

Ensuring quality and integration – Healthcare organizations are not simply integrating with each other. They are also plugging into systems run by other entities, such as insurers' networks that track transaction data. If a doctor and a specialist, for example, use different systems, then neither can rely on those systems to provide complete and accurate data.

Managing risk – Risk occurs at both an individual and an organizational level. Healthcare IT must help reduce risk by improving monitoring and data-tracking capabilities and by improving feedback on performance outcomes. While challenging now, growth in consolidation will drive increased standardization.

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Improving patients' access to data – Patients are frustrated with the often complex processes that stand between them and their records—if they can gain access to them at all. Patients trust the information more if they are engaged with it, rather than being excluded from the system. One outcome is that patients can share data with doctors outside the system. This also benefits hospitals by ensuring the data is accurate and complete.

Securing hospital environments – Healthcare IT's core is built around the integration of healthcare organizations and

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practitioners, plus their interaction with the public through websites, patient portals and the availability and accuracy of records. Suppliers must demonstrate that they have the proper capabilities to deploy healthcare IT effectively in their communities. They must show their systems are reliable and scalable and that access and privacy are not mutually exclusive.

Reducing data breaches – Increased use of mobile technology is complicating the security burden and thresholds that are critical for CIOs at healthcare organizations. As the service landscape becomes more mobile, providers must show that their systems are properly encrypted and the data is adequately protected. On the upside, mobile access provides a great opportunity for organizations to improve performance outcomes through the sharing of diagnoses and knowledge.

Managing appropriate scale and scope – Integrating the historically fragmented healthcare ecosystem is an extraordinarily complex task—especially when it is carried out in the bright spotlight of public scrutiny. Moving too quickly on implementation can increase the risk of failure and undermine trust. Government, as it has taken a more direct role in the healthcare industry, has learned to exercise caution in the implementation of healthcare IT.

Adopting and sharing proper standards – All organizations touched by healthcare IT must be confident they are adopting the right standards and the systems that they embrace will function as planned. Organizations need to work together to ensure they are putting standards in place that will ease integration, while helping them track data in a way that will improve transparency and build patient confidence.

Managing people – Organizations must keep their personnel trained and up to date on the latest technological advances. Only through proper training can they understand the infrastructure and the evolving technology needs of their organizations. Senior managers and executives, in particular, may have served in their same roles for years and may be due for a refresher.

Creating actionable information – Connected systems, active monitoring, longitudinal studies, individualized medicine, clinical trials, Medicare and insurance payment systems, electronic health records and personal health records

collectively add up to a vast and seemingly disparate trove of information. Advanced data analytics must be applied to help identify actionable trends to both improve patient outcomes and rationalize the cost of healthcare.

Rationalizing oversight and governance – The government's involvement in exchanges and other provisions of the ACA and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) expands the sphere of trust beyond the commercial side of the business.

Now that healthcare IT is an active player in healthcare delivery, suppliers need to shore up their credibility as trusted government business partners. Suppliers, too, must trust the government as an innovation regulator and evaluator. The government, for its part, needs to implement healthcare IT, while building confidence through thoughtfully executed pilot programs.

As companies attempt to combine systems, integration issues can quickly compound.

Technology will continue to be a driver in the integration and evolution of healthcare organizations, but for it to be effective, the technology applications must inspire confidence. Healthcare organizations need to work with their healthcare IT suppliers to ensure new technology preserves patients' rights while improving patients' access to data. The infrastructure they build must be reliable, scalable and secure while also improving efficiency.

Conclusion
Technology systems built with careful oversight are a key tool in providing quality patient care in a cost-efficient and compliant manner. By focusing on developing trust in healthcare IT, the healthcare industry can move into a new age of integration, in which technology works seamlessly among all the participants in the healthcare marketplace. **NP**