



Risk is proliferating as these and all other aspects of healthcare are touched by modifications and outright overhauls to the way care is delivered. IT reaches into virtually every task, producing data security issues through mistakes and cybercriminal activity. Health information exchanges, for all their contributions to care continuity, are inherently risky by virtue of their electronic nature.

ACOs weigh heavily on the risk scale, too. The collaborations between previously unaffiliated providers and proliferation of population health initiatives can be as complicating as they are promising. New kinds of partnerships must be formed in order to stay within the boundaries on referrals and other financial relationships.

A natural IA leadership role

Effective identification and response to the myriad risks facing today's healthcare organizations require extensive collaboration and cooperation. Synthesizing knowledge from the various groups tasked with identifying risks and the means for mitigating those risks requires a leadership team that sets aside concerns over turf ownership. IA is a natural to step into such a leadership role, as they have worked with many of the same leaders fashioning enterprise-wide risk management programs.

.....
: Create controls that can
: be measured, monitored,
: reviewed and evaluated.
:

To be viewed as a thought leader on risk and control, IA must work directly with the leaders in every key functional area. The most effective IA functions are those that are not just at the table when strategy is set and plans developed, but are there as an active participant valued by

administration and operational leadership alike. Seasoned executives all know building controls into a process initially is more effective and less costly than retrofits afterward.

The chief audit executive must also be the primary advocate to ensure IA has and continues to build on this capability and reputation in finance, operations, compliance, IT and clinical settings.

If IA is not at the leadership table it may always be playing catch-up trying to address risks after the fact.

Take part in developing the processes and controls, and clarify what should be subject to auditing and reviews to assure leaders and users the process is working the way they intend. Educate your colleagues in other disciplines about what internal audit can do to help them be more successful.

The call for collaboration

Rather than simply cooperating with others, engage in true collaboration Risk assessment and subsequent management of risk requires that there is agreement on descriptions so everyone can identify and categorize the risks by type, severity and likelihood. With this common understanding in place, IA should more easily be able to work with the following groups to mitigate risks when they are identified.

Compliance

A good starting place is the chief compliance officer. Much of the strategy of the compliance function directs the efforts in risk management. Mutually identify risks, create monitoring processes for mitigation and work cooperatively on follow-up of all processes.

Together, IA and the compliance function ensure a process that is not only compliant, but is also effective and efficient. The customers of these types of IA-compliance collaborative audits generally learn more from them as well, further increasing the likelihood of sustained compliance.

