

Greetings,

As health reform gains momentum, several key topics are starting to get the attention they deserve. Among these are hospital readmission rates, which have increased in the U.S. at an alarming rate for years. Nearly 20% of all Medicare beneficiaries are readmitted within 30 days of discharge.\* Many of these readmissions could be prevented.

Facing steep financial penalties for readmissions, hospitals are taking a much closer look at the problem. At its root, the issue is one of quality. It is the goal of achieving a more quality-driven, fiscally sound healthcare delivery system that motivates the architects of reform to emphasize transparency, accountability, and coordination across the continuum of care.

As organizations consider process improvement teams and new models for care delivery as paths to improved quality, one thing is certain: Information technology will be an essential tool for supporting their efforts.

Data mining and business analytics provide the tools necessary to understand patient populations and to uncover the underlying causes related to the quality challenge. Armed with this information, organizations gain valuable insight into areas of needed focus. Improved knowledge of the community will help organizations to develop programs that address the specific needs of their patients. In turn, these programs may be the basis of the care delivery system's initiatives for promoting quality care and, as a result, reducing preventable readmissions.

IT can support efforts to reduce readmissions through the use of automated assessments, whereby patients are screened for certain health related risks or socio-economic factors that may predispose them to risk for readmission. As these risks are identified, workflow technology helps clinicians monitor related information, notifying them of specific events and escalating problems to other members of the care team who can take appropriate action.

With the help of workflow technology, IT supports the clinician at the point of care, whether the task is to review the latest vital signs, monitor medications and results, document a patient plan of care, or deliver patient education and discharge instructions. This technology also has the ability to provide information to the clinician based on pre-defined rules and trigger points assisting in care coordination within the hospital and smooth transitions in care across geographic boundaries.

Charged with increased accountability and fiscal responsibility for readmissions, organizations will look to their IT solutions to assist them in introducing the process and organizational changes needed to address the challenge. Reducing preventable readmissions is about quality and those organizations that use IT as a tool to support their efforts will make the greatest impact.

Warm Regards,

Gail

\*Source: Jencks SF, et al., "Rehospitalizations among Patients in the Medicare Fee-for-Service Program," *New England Journal of Medicine*, 2009, 360: 1418-1428; Nursing Executive Center analysis.