HITSP
Healthcare Information Technology Standards Panel

2009 webinar series . . . HITSP and U.S. healthcare IT interoperability

Steve's Story* . . . part four

"Steve" is a 27-year-old male coping with the long-term effects of a brain tumor that was removed during his childhood. He continues to face issues regarding the availability and usability of his medical information during follow-up and emergency care.

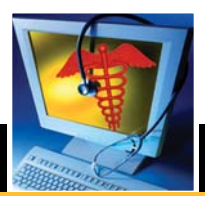
It's been twenty-five years since my pediatrician discovered that I had a brain tumor as a toddler. Ever since then, I've been in and out of hospitals and doctors' offices.

Of course, I understand that it's often crucial for me to visit these care sites – from my initial surgery to remove the brain tumor to some more recent visits that I scheduled when my headaches returned, I have to keep in close contact with all of my care providers.

During most of my visits, my doctors perform various tests and scans on me. I have several different doctors – a general practitioner, a neurosurgeon, and a neurologist, just to name a few – and they don't always share the outcomes of these tests and scans with one another. That means I often have to make a separate trip to the hospital for tests and examinations that had already been performed a few weeks earlier by another one of my doctors.

All of these visits to the hospital and other care facilities are starting to wear on me. Not only are the repeated visits really inconvenient for my schedule, but they've even begun to have a negative impact on my health. A few years ago, I was in the hospital overnight for yet another test, and I contracted an infection during my stay. The infection led to partial paralysis. It's frustrating because I'm visiting these doctors to try to get better – and this has only made me worse.

I'm now qualified to receive disability payments from the Social Security Administration. This is a benefit that I really need and appreciate, but taking advantage of it hasn't been easy. On top of the confusion of compiling my medical records and tests among my doctors, it can take a while to get all of my information processed. My cousin was recently wounded serving as a soldier in Iraq, and he too has been working to get all of his records together.



From reducing my number of hospital visits to ensuring that my disability checks arrive on time, I know that things would be a lot easier if my medical records and test results could be shared accurately and easily with the appropriate doctors, organizations, and agencies.

**based on a true story*

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Steve's story is stressful for him and his family, but his experience is not that uncommon for anyone with a chronic disease. Poor communication between and among doctors, labs, pharmacies, insurance companies, and other providers cause many patients to suffer from fragmented care that is detrimental to their health.

Healthcare in an Interoperable World

In an interoperable world, Steve's health records would be interoperable, able to be seamlessly and securely transferred from one healthcare facility to another, between and among diverse systems.

Providers would be able to quickly and easily exchange Steve's healthcare information with his consent. With access to updated and accurate medical records, Steve's healthcare providers would have access to the results of his tests and scans, as well as active and past medication lists, allergies, current and previous problem lists, and registration and insurance information. Steve would not have to visit hospitals and doctors' offices repeatedly to take the same tests, reducing his risk of contracting illnesses from other patients while at healthcare facilities.

Both Steve and his cousin, a wounded soldier returning from Iraq, would be able to request that their medical information be shared with the Social Security Administration. This would facilitate the timely distribution of disability checks, assuring that there is no lapse from month to month due to inadequate information.

In an interoperable world, Steve wouldn't have to worry about filling out forms, taking the same test multiple times, or providing his doctors with information, giving him more time and energy to focus on what's really important: his health.

HITSP: Enabling Healthcare Interoperability

The Healthcare Information Technology Standards Panel (HITSP) is a national, volunteer-driven, consensus-based organization that is working to ensure the interoperability of electronic health records in the United States.

A cooperative partnership between the public and private sectors, HITSP identifies and selects the necessary functional components and standards to enable the interoperable exchange of health care data. HITSP also documents any gaps in standards which must be resolved. The Panel then develops guidance documents known as Interoperability Specifications (IS) that recommend the standards that will meet clinical and business needs for sharing information across organizations and systems. Once an IS is recognized by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), agencies administering or sponsoring federal health programs are required to implement the standards.

Operating under contract to HHS, HITSP is sponsored by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) in cooperation with strategic partners the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS), the Advanced Technology Institute (ATI), and Booz Allen Hamilton.

Nearly 400 organizations representing consumers, health care providers, public health agencies, government agencies, standards developing organizations, and other stakeholders now participate in the HITSP and its committees.

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More Information

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