HITSP
Healthcare Information Technology Standards Panel

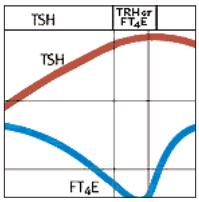
a webinar series on U.S. healthcare interoperability

Steve's Story* . . . part five

"Steve" is a 26-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.

Lately my lab work has been coming back normal, and I'm really grateful for that. Still, I have a strict schedule of appointments in order to keep my tests and lab results up-to-date. My doctors are always stressing that it's important that we monitor my health to make sure that any changes or abnormal lab results are noticed right away. I understand why this is all necessary, but the constant string of appointments are really taking their toll, especially since they often require daytime appointments that conflict with school or work. I can't wait for the day when I can cut back on the visits, even if it's just the appointments to confirm that my lab results turned out okay.

Recently, my family had much bigger health problems to deal with – my grandmother's. For the past few years, she hadn't been doing too well. At one point she was seeing about six different doctors. They all kept paper records, and never shared lab and test results with one another. She had to tell each doctor about the medications and tests that the other five had given to her – and that was a lot to handle for an 83-year-old. My mom ended up keeping her own records of my grandmother's healthcare information in a file that she brought to each doctor's visit.



A few months ago, her lab work started coming back highly abnormal. We knew something was seriously wrong, but the doctors weren't been able to "connect the dots" and find any trends that could explain her problem.

While the doctors tried to figure out what was wrong with her, she took a turn for the worse. She wasn't absorbing her thyroid medication, and her TSH tests – which evaluate thyroid function – were coming back off the charts. A normal result for a TSH test is 0. - 5.0 mIU/L5, and my grandmother's results reached 75 mIU/L. Each doctor was giving her different medications and treatments, and she struggled to deal with the resulting complications.

After months of suffering, my grandmother passed away. It's been really hard on our family, and we're upset that things might have turned out differently if there had been better access to information that would have helped Grandma's doctors coordinate her treatment in a better way.

*based on a true story

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Steve's story is not happy, and it is not uncommon. Poor communications 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, all laboratory results could be stored in multiple places – different doctors' offices, labs, and hospitals – and yet brought together seamlessly and securely when an authorized doctor or patient requests to view them.

Patient healthcare-related data will conform to nationally recognized Interoperability Specifications (IS) established by the Healthcare Information Technology Standards Panel.

A locator service would gather the lab results and present them in a clear, easy-to-read format.

Doctors would be able to send queries about certain aspects of the medical record to the locator service. They would then receive secure, tailored information about the documents in the record — in both human-readable and machine-readable formats — giving them the ability to identify and retrieve only relevant information.

Access to lab results from multiple doctors and healthcare providers will empower caregivers to better assess the needs of their patients in a much more timely way.

Additionally, laboratory or test results that fall within the range and category of interest for Biosurveillance Reporting (*see Steve's Story - part four*) could be automatically reported as required by federal, state or local legally authorized public health agencies.

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 healthcare 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 HHS Secretary Michael Leavitt, agencies administering or sponsoring federal health programs are required to implement the standards.

Operating under contract to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (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
www.HITSP.org *or* hitsp@ansi.org