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# Benefits Realization: The Key to Conveying Meaningful Impact

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**Y**ou know and I know the reality – health information management and technology make very real and significant improvements in healthcare for Canadians in all parts of this country every day – shorter wait times, better access to care in remote communities, fewer expensive hospital stays and much, much more.

So, why doesn't this good news attract more government attention, headlines or funding? Why don't we hear more about these benefits which are absolutely essential to maintaining the current health system as well as ensuring equal access to quality healthcare for our children, grandchildren and future generations?

The answer is right in front of us in the health informatics (HI) community. Generally as an industry, we still have a lot to learn when it comes to effectively evaluating and communicating the positive impacts. In our context, "benefits realization" is a process we must further develop among the other skill sets needed in HI.

This isn't just about evaluating a go-live. Rather, it involves a baseline understanding of current challenges, the business case for change and the quantifiable impact of that change on the healthcare system and patients. Canadian healthcare is big business – the spending projection for 2010 is \$192 billion or \$5,614 per person – so we must be able to report the benefits in concrete, measurable terms.

On the plus side, there are signs of change. Projects and initiatives, both in Canada and internationally, are having a demonstrable impact; we are getting better as an industry at telling the important stories about why eHealth matters. The Canadian Health Informatics Awards Gala in November 2010 was a tremendous celebration of the impact on improving the patient's experience and health system as a whole. Here is a sample of the success stories from the gala.

- The Leadership in HI Award winner, Francis Lau, PhD, is someone who definitely gets benefits realization. Working with Canada Health Infoway, he developed the framework that is now used to evaluate the impact of electronic health record (EHR) implementation initiatives across Canada and he authored THE guide to that is used nationally to design EHR evaluation studies and methods. A man of multiple accomplishments in HI research and education, Dr. Lau continues to seek answers to tough questions like, "Is eHealth living up to its expectations?" and "Are we making advances in our use of EHR?" as eHealth Research Chair with the University of Victoria's School of Health Information Science. (Read the full report about Dr. Lau elsewhere in this issue.)
- Remember H1N1? Behind the scenes of the 2009 pandemic was the largely untold story about dramatic improvement in mass vaccine delivery in Ontario courtesy of the Protocol for Electronic Clinic Systems (PECS)

program. The brainchild of Emerging Leader in HI Award winner Dr. Jane Nassif and the team at Niagara Region, PECS gave many Ontario health units the ability to track clients, inventory and clinic statistics electronically. Two big pluses with PECS – it can be implemented simultaneously across normal jurisdictional boundaries and allows for standardized data collection across health units. Thanks to Dr. Nassif, Manager, Medical Informatics, Niagara Regional Health Department, and her team, immunization joined the 21st century in Ontario with PECS.

- With annual growth of more than 20% and national and international recognition, the University Health Network (UHN) Telehealth Program is proof positive that a relatively small team with limited resources can make a most significant impact. Awarded the Excellence in Canadian Telehealth tribute, videoconferencing has been successfully embedded into complex clinical pathways including organ transplantation, oncology, a wide range of complex chronic diseases and specialized consultation services through the program. Serving the three UHN hospitals and eight program groupings, the program consistently ensures equitable access and quality of specialized service to patients in rural and remote areas by eliminating travel limitations.
- The Cancer Surgery Alberta Web Surgical Medical Reporting (WebSMR) system, the Innovation



in the Adoption of HI Award winner, is another good news story for both patients and providers. Today, 75% of Alberta surgeons who are eligible to perform cancer surgery use this system of pre-formatted templates to document cancer surgeries in lieu of dictating an operative report. This means they can obtain their real-time outcomes on a daily basis, which helps them determine the course of treatment and follow-up, future educational and training strategies, waiting times, standard of care in a specific geographic location and more. The first known electronic surgical synoptic reporting system, the WebSMR is being implemented at selected Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia cancer centers.

- At North York General Hospital (NYGH), the new fully evidence-based

eCare Computerized Provider Order Entry (CPOE) system underscores the powerful link between technology and enhanced patient care. Rooted in the commitment of project lead Dr. Jeremy Theal, Community-Based Physician Leader/Innovator Award winner, the CPOE is a Canadian first with 300+ order sets that link regularly updated, contextual evidence from medical literature to the physician's ordering workflow. Dr. Theal, NYGH's Director, Medical Informatics, built on this major accomplishment by initiating a review of hospital-based processes when evidence in the new CPOE order sets indicated particular treatments as a standard of care. Today, as a result, patients benefit from a variety of new policies and procedures, such as a screening to ensure stroke patients

receive bedside swallowing assessment within 24 hours of admission and an electronic process that enables MDs to perform medication reconciliation, produce prescriptions electronically and provide detailed follow-up care instructions on discharge.

These successes are just a drop in the bucket when it comes to the positive impacts of health management and IT. Now we need to work together as an industry to develop our benefits realization skills, so we can, together, communicate these successes in a truly meaningful manner.

(Visit [www.coachorg.com](http://www.coachorg.com) for profiles about all the 2010 COACH Award winners.)

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