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Using Data to Improve Healthcare

Translating Publicly Available Data into Quality Improvement Initiatives

By Kristin Jenkins, JD, MBA, FACHE

Data are of no value unless they drive action. Action in healthcare has limited positive impact when it is uninformed or uncoordinated.

Publicly available data can help organizations improve healthcare quality. However, getting the most out of these data requires the right tools. A data warehouse is one tool organizations can use to leverage publicly available data to improve the quality of healthcare. A data warehouse is a database used for reporting and analysis.

The Dallas-Fort Worth Hospital Council (DFWHC) Foundation is a nonprofit corporation that works under the Dallas-Fort Worth Hospital Council to promote safe, high-quality, cost-effective, accessible, and equitable healthcare. Here it shares how using a data warehouse collaborative brings insights to its work.

DFWHC's Data Warehouse

Since 1999 the DFWHC Foundation has used a proprietary all-payer, all-claims data warehouse collaborative called the Information and Quality Services Center. IQSC serves as a forum where north Texas hospitals and health systems can share patient encounter information.

The warehouse contains claims information from 95 percent of north Texas acute care hospitals, representing 7.5 million patients and more than 25 million claims for in- and outpatient encounters.

Furthermore, a regional enterprise master patient index allows tracking of readmissions and repeat ER visits for patients across the Dallas-Fort Worth region. Robust and easy-to-use business intelligence tools allow hospitals to mine the warehouse for unique information to address healthcare issues.

Data use and quality assurance are overseen by a group of hospitals working through IQSC. The provider community has made a significant investment in obtaining this information. Experts review the information to provide insight and wisdom for action.

As a result, healthcare improvement efforts in north Texas are now in full swing.

Healthcare Improvement Efforts

The north Texas healthcare community uses IQSC information to meet the Department of Health and Human Services' National Strategy for Quality Improvement in Healthcare objectives. The data set has also enabled the DFWHC Foundation to create four new initiatives to improve the quality of healthcare in the community.

Community Health Collaborative

The DFWHC Foundation has created a Community Health Collaborative and a sister Web site, www.healthytexas.org. The collaborative combines information from the regional data warehouse with national health, economic, and safety information to provide a comprehensive view of a six-county area encompassing Dallas-Fort Worth.

The information can be searched by disease state, health condition, or community health issue. The collaborative is also capable of separating information by geographic area. This information is used to find best practice information, prioritize community health initiatives, and serve as a resource for researchers and grant writers hoping to bring health resources to north Texas.

Participants include hospitals, physicians, community organizations, chambers of commerce, public health departments, and universities. The Web site is fully accessible to the public for general use and is highlighted in several local universities' public health and policy courses.

North Texas Accountable Healthcare Partnership

DFWHC and the DFWHC Foundation are supporting the new health information exchange (HIE) and quality improvement and cost-savings sharing models in north Texas. The North Texas Accountable Healthcare Partnership is creating a 13-county regional HIE that will encompass 150 hospitals, 12,000 physicians, and ancillary service providers and pharmaceutical organizations. The board represents local healthcare providers, health insurers, employers, and patients.

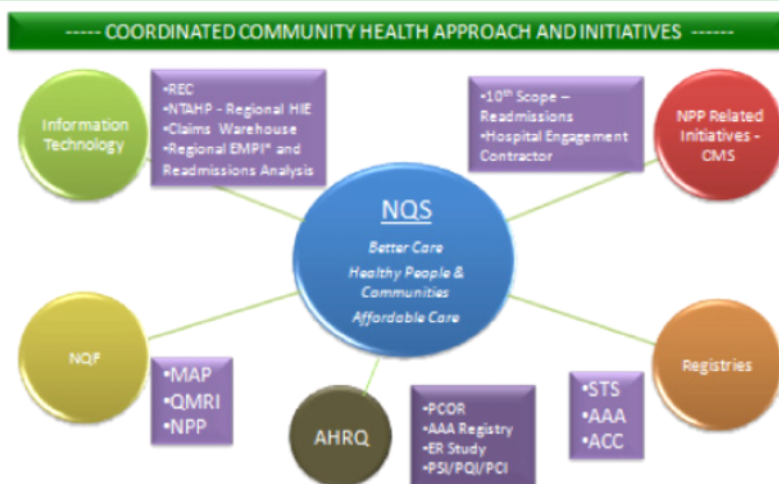
The group's agreed-upon best care algorithms (e.g., requirements for certain care practices that have been set up to share cost savings) can be monitored by utilizing the HIE to collect information for diabetic, congestive heart failure, and asthmatic patients. Storage of this information and business intelligence tools at the DFWHC Foundation can be used to assess performance and cost-saving opportunities.

This initiative is in the early stages, with the expectation of robust exchange by the end of 2012.

DFWHC Foundation's Quality Improvement Activities

The illustration below represents north Texas hospitals and the DFWHC Foundation's initiatives and relationships centered on achieving the National Strategy for Quality Improvement's aims for better care, healthy people and communities, and affordable care.

Regional Coordination of National Improvement Initiatives



Texas Quality Initiative

The DFWHC Foundation, with the leadership of the region's top cardiothoracic surgeons and their hospital partners, is engaged in an initiative pairing the existing claims warehouse with a Society for Thoracic Surgeon's certified clinical registry. This will provide a unique assessment of care and cost as well as research opportunities.

The initiative will allow for the integration of the American College of Cardiology registry and is planned to expand statewide by 2014.

North Texas Regional Extension Center

In April 2010 the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology awarded the DFWHC Foundation an agreement to establish the North Texas Regional Extension Center to help primary care providers in north Texas implement electronic health records and achieve meaningful use.

With more physicians implementing electronic records, the DFWHC Foundation can match the care and claims information from more than 1,500 primary care providers in the region with hospital-based patient information and clinical registry data to create views of the community's healthcare encounters and prioritize needs for improvement.

The North Texas Regional Extension Center and Texas Quality Initiative bring key physician leaders to what was once a hospital-centric information center and align the community to meet HHS's National Strategy for Quality Improvement, including improved health and care and reduced costs.

To learn more, visit www.dfwhcfoundation.org.

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