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# Healthcare Trend Report

## Interoperability: Prepare Now to Pave the Way for Fully Connected Care

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# Interoperability is no quick-fix, do-it-yourself project.

While this initiative has been around for some time, it has recently become a top priority for the healthcare industry due in large part to the rise of the healthcare consumer. The need for interoperability comes down to the drive for greater connectivity among historically disparate systems for the future of healthcare. Like any other large-scale endeavor, though, you have to view the journey to full interoperability through a long-term lens.

Today, few healthcare organizations have the resources needed to solve the complex challenges related to interoperability. In fact, most organizations are simply trying to meet the specific compliance goals of Meaningful Use (MU). And no wonder: it's hard to look beyond all the short-term dollars at stake.

MU is an important first step on the path to full interoperability on a national scale. But, it's only one of many steps to put you on the right path to interoperability. Additional evolving market forces — including standards and consumerism — will likely continue to shape the march toward interoperability over the next five to 10 years.

## Market forces affecting interoperability

Healthcare is far more complex than many other industries, and is built on a long history of siloed technology systems. As a result, technology standards are expected to play a major role in advancing data sharing. The interoperability learning curve will likely get increasingly shallow in the coming years as various standards — such as HL7®, FHIR® and CCD®, for example — are developed and adopted by vendors.


### Interoperability check list:

Set the stage for interoperability success. How many can you check off the list?

- Analyze
- Document
- Find gaps and inefficiencies
- Identify ways to bridge the gaps

## Yet technology standards alone are not a silver bullet

On top of standards, market forces such as value-based reimbursement models, population health management and collaborative care are compounding and further driving the need toward interoperability.

In fact, one of the most powerful market forces is the rise of the healthcare "consumer," which will likely create enormous pressure for greater data sharing. As patients pay more for their own care and begin to shop competitively for providers, they undoubtedly will clamor for the same sorts of consumer transparency and convenience they already get from banks, retail stores and other service-oriented businesses.

So how can you equip your organization to meet the business, consumer and interoperability needs of the future? The key is to prepare now.

## Four steps to prepare for interoperability

The ability to capture data effectively is the essence of full interoperability. Understanding this, healthcare leaders can help set the stage for interoperability success by considering a four-step approach to evaluating current processes sfor capturing data:

### Step 1: Analyze.

In the rush to get things done, it's easy to forget the crucial first step — analyzing the current state. A rapid process assessment (RPA), which includes assessing your business processes and how you manage them, is one way you can walk through each phase of your existing information management processes from top to bottom.

Through a RPA, you can see how data moves within and across your organization and identify cost-saving opportunities. Using this approach, you can pinpoint the bottlenecks in information flow and their impact on throughput. From there, a redesigned process can be put into place — a process that helps to bridge the consumption gap between what your technology is capable of and how it's actually being utilized today.

But this isn't the end of analyzing workflows. While an important first step, it's also an ongoing step that should be conducted regularly to monitor the productivity of your organization.

### Step 2: Document.

Along with a rapid process assessment, it's helpful to track and document all work efforts. If you have had a long-standing registration process in place, for example, you might be surprised to see how your resources are really being spent. Organizations often find that their processes contain many more steps, complexities and costs than they imagined.

Take an organization that realizes incomplete collection of patient information is a chief bottleneck in their process. Many organizations have standard paperwork and other processes for collecting patient information during every visit, and even how they treat images sent from another department. By documenting and tracking this process, organizations can see where there may be extra steps, or the specific areas where they are missing patient information when viewing their electronic health record (EHR).

> *"The ability to capture data effectively is the essence of full interoperability. Those who fail to prepare for interoperability early enough will likely struggle. Those who prepare now, though, will be better poised for success."*

### Step 3: Find gaps and inefficiencies.

Partners trained in workflow analysis can use the results of the first two steps to help pinpoint gaps and inefficiencies, and to uncover opportunities for operational and financial improvement. For instance, consider a paper lab report that's faxed to another office, but not actually entered into the EHR for the provider to see until a week later. Gaps like this could result in a provider missing a vital patient diagnosis. Once you've discovered the inefficiencies within your workflow, you can prioritize which gaps to fill, and begin investigating what solutions may work best for your organization.

### Step 4: Identify ways to bridge the gaps.

Whether with existing or new technology, there are many opportunities for you to improve your organization's ability to safely exchange secured data in real time. These can range from streamlining workflows to employing technology that's better suited to your organizational needs. For example, information often gets lost or miscommunicated when being transferred from one EHR to another, or from paper to an EHR. By employing technology and strategies that help optimize your workflows, you can bolster the efficiency of your data management. It's also important to consider staff preferences and abilities when implementing new systems and strategies into your day-to-day, as this can affect how successful new initiatives are implemented.

## HEALTHCARE TREND REPORT: INTEROPERABILITY

Based on what we're seeing today, we might see the typical healthcare experience 10 years from now unfold something like this:

A patient downloads data from his personal health devices and schedules an appointment with his doctor from his smartphone. When he arrives at the hospital, registration staff already have the right information; no redundant paperwork. And while he's in the exam room, his physician accesses whatever data she needs and collaborates with other providers from her tablet.

In the future, interoperability will likely optimize the way healthcare organizations capture data across the entire continuum of care. Those who fail to prepare early enough will likely struggle. Those who prepare now, though, will be better poised for success.

### Interoperability quick facts:

- 39% of industry stakeholders said medical devices' inability to communicate with each other is the most challenging element of using them.[1]
- 89% of providers said electronic data exchanges improve the patient's quality of care.
- 94% of non-federal acute care hospitals use a certified EHR to collect electronic data about patients.

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[1] http://www.beckershospitalreview.com/healthcare-information-technology/nurses-say-interoperability-failures-affect-patient-care.html