

# CHILMARK RESEARCH

## Remember: Technology is but a Tool

March 29, 2011 by John Moore



Yesterday, Chilmark Research participated in the CRG conference, *Driving Change Through Managed Care IT from Provider Payments to Quality*, which was held in New York City. Despite having a title that no one will be able to remember, the overall theme of the event and presentations therein gave one a bird's eye view into what payers are thinking as we march forward with healthcare reform and the digitization of the healthcare sector.

A common theme that repeated itself numerous times over the course of the day was the lack of business process maturity in the healthcare sector. Meg McCarthy, EVP of Innovation at Aetna was the first to make this statement citing this issue as arguably the number one challenge for this industry sector to overcome. *(McCarthy provided some interesting details on the Medicity acquisition but we'll save that for a later date.)*

Later that day, Jessica Zabbo, Provider Technology Supervisor at RI-BCBS gave a very detailed presentation on her company's experiences working with providers on the adoption and use of EHRs. Over the last several years RI-BCBS has done a couple of small pilots. In both cases a defining parameter of success was business process maturity. For example, the company did a Patient Centered Medical Home (PCMH) pilot that coupled pay for performance metrics (P4P) with EHR use. Basically P4P measurements were to be recorded and reported through the EHR. One of the key lessons learned was that P4P program success was highly dependent on the EHR being fully implemented and physicians

comfortable with its use (process maturity). But in a *Catch-22*, to successfully incorporate P4P metrics into the EHR requires a very deep understanding of practice focus and workflow. Without that understanding, failure of the P4P program is almost certain.

Thus, it is with some dismay that when one goes to the HHS site to view the recently released [ONC Strategic Plan](#) for HIT adoption one sees the figure below:



### What's the problem you ask?

#### Where is "Process?"

Nowhere in this figure is there any mentioned of business process/workflow. Technology is but a tool. The proceses by which clinicians collect and securely share health information is where the focus needs to be with technology in the backseat, not in the driver's seat. But this figure goes beyond just flipping the equation, it completely ignores "process" altogether putting technology squarely at the beginning, at the start to all things grand and possible if only clinicians would simply go adopt and use the technology. *(Despite some wishful thinking and pronouncements, e.g. "the era of EHRs is upon us" providers are not necessarily chomping at the meaningful use bit.)*

Now to ONC's credit, they are in a bit of a bind here for to admit that business processes and change thereof need to be taken into account would most assuredly require a major rethink of what is truly possible in the next several years as ONC tries to empty the HITECH coffers of its billions and demonstrate to Congress that this program is indeed a success and is creating jobs (remember, this was passed as part of the Stimulus Act and creating jobs was priority numero uno). Unfortunately, being a job creation bill is not conducive to providing the time necessary to create and implement new business processes that are supported by IT. Business process change takes a tremendous amount of

forethought before any contract is signed for any EHR, but HITECH works counter to that with aggressive adoption and reimbursement schedules leaving very little time for thoughtfulness in re-architecting processes.

In a prescient way, Chilmark predicted that the issue of process re-engineering would be one of the greatest challenges in adoption and use of EHRs and recommended to ONC in our [2009 comments](#) that ONC consider relaxing the schedule to allow to allow sufficient time for process re-engineering. Unfortunately, it appears that it remains full-speed ahead with HIT driving a weaving HITECH truck down a narrow and winding road.

<http://chilmarkresearch.com/2011/03/29/remember-technology-is-but-a-tool/>