

Western and Asian governments share a common challenge in containing skyrocketing costs of chronic disease care, while addressing new threats brought on by infectious diseases. Innovative solutions are necessary, starting with a shift in the focus of healthcare from the current model that concentrates 80% of total spending on the last two years of life to a new paradigm that emphasizes disease prevention, early detection and treatment, and active aging. Technol-



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ogy will play an increasingly significant role in this process.

On April 11 and 12, 2006, the Health Information Technology and Policy (HIT) Lab convened 47 participants from seven economies in Tokyo to identify the needs of healthcare systems around the globe and pinpoint areas where technologies can help address current challenges. The main themes discussed at the meeting are highlighted below.

Key Takeaways

Growing, Focused Role for IT

IT is increasingly an effective tool in addressing systemic needs. However, its adoption should be considered the means to a healthier world, not an end in itself.

Information Sharing

Recent experiences with cross-border infectious disease outbreaks and large-scale disasters have contributed to an increased awareness of the need for real-time access to, and greater sharing of, information—both domestically and globally.

Convergence of Challenges

Western and Asian healthcare systems share many common challenges, including those presented by both chronic diseases and acute crises. IT can help merge solutions for both sets of challenges.

Pragmatic, Forward-looking Approach

Leaders must focus on existing challenges while leveraging ongoing HIT efforts and keeping an eye toward future infrastructure needs.

Funding for Innovative Solutions

Governments can use financial incentives as well as performance and quality requirements to encourage the development and adoption of technologies while maximizing benefits.

Collaboration

A coordinated effort, both within individual societies and at national, regional, and global levels, is essential to minimize waste and maximize the potential contribution of technologies to healthcare and public health systems.



Featured Presentations

“A New Healthcare Paradigm”

Naoyuki Akikusa

Chairman, Fujitsu Limited

“Expectations for HIT”

Haruo Shimada

Professor, Department of Economics, Keio University

“Policy Challenges Facing Healthcare Systems”

Chien Earn Lee

Director, Health Regulation Division, Singapore Ministry of Health

“Overcoming Policy and Technical Obstacles”

Ticia Gerber

Vice President for Public Policy and International Programs, eHealth Initiative

“Bridging the Gap Between Healthcare Policy Needs and Technology-Based Solutions”

Yasuhiro Suzuki

Director, Research and Development, Health Policy Bureau, Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare

“Responding to Needs With Solutions”

Jeremy Bonfini

Government Relations Manager, Intel Corporation

“HIT and Population Health”

Ann Marie Kimball

Director, APEC Emerging Infections Network

“Incentivizing Health IT in the Developing World”

Neil Jordan

Executive Director, Worldwide Health and Human Services, Public Sector, Microsoft Corporation

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Making the Case for HIT

Challenges

Stakeholders struggle to strike a balance between competing needs:

- ☞ The demand for real-time access to information competes with security and privacy concerns
- ☞ Budgetary constraints limit government spending on “unproven” technologies, yet financial incentives inhibit the adoption of new technologies in the health sector, making their benefits hard to quantify
- ☞ HIT adoption involves increased up-front costs, while financial savings can be hard to assess
- ☞ Reduced delays, epidemic containment, and other benefits of HIT may be “invisible”
- ☞ Market competition and the appeal of diversity rivals the benefits of standardization

Although bulletproof evidence proving the efficacy and cost-savings of these technologies in improving quality of care are still being developed, IT solutions are proving useful both in detecting and containing public health threats and in providing innovative approaches to chronic disease prevention, detection, and treatment. When making the case for HIT, however, it is important to remember that IT is a tool that can help us improve health outcomes, not the goal in itself.

Benefits of HIT: Information, Access, and Patient Safety

For patients, IT facilitates both access to information and a greater personal role in health management; it also enhances the quality and safety of care received. For individual doctors and networked medical teams, IT can provide real-time access to medical re-

cords and treatment guidelines, thereby minimizing redundant tests, errors, and adverse events. As a result, IT enables cost savings while increasing effectiveness. For example, Taiwan’s pioneering “SmartCard” has successfully demonstrated cost-savings and safety benefits. Twenty-thousand adverse events have been averted as a result of the card and prescription transcription error rates were reduced from 5 to 0.5%. On the other hand, lack of integration between hospitals and standardization of codes has impeded progress.

While HIT offers many unmeasurable benefits, some results can be captured and quantified, such as a reduction in adverse reactions, redundant lab tests, and unnecessary hospitalizations. Metrics to capture such quality and performance improvements should be integrated into systems to build support.

Toward the Future

Pragmatic, Forward-looking Approach

In order to keep expectations and costs manageable, decisionmakers should adopt a practical, “low-hanging fruit” approach and focus on meeting immediate needs. Leveraging existing standards and initiatives whenever possible will help speed up the adoption process, as will engaging all stakeholders in determining the content, security, and interoperability requirements of IT solutions.

A prioritized, sequenced implementation plan for health IT systems will facilitate future modification as information and needs change. Ideally, these systems should also link with global population health management initiatives over time.

A coordinated effort, both within individual societies and at a global level, is essential if we are to minimize waste and maximize the potential contribution of technology to healthcare systems.

Globalization of Healthcare

The global HIV/AIDS epidemic, SARS, avian flu, and other population health threats that transcend borders have fueled the creation of more reliable channels of communication, both within national bureaucracies and at a global level. Greater connectedness and interoperability of systems across borders can facilitate global clinical trial networks and other public health management initiatives to maximize efficiencies on a global scale, while cultivating trust between governments.

Recommendations for Policymakers

A coordinated effort, both within individual societies and at a global level, is essential to minimize waste and maximize the potential contribution of technology to healthcare systems. Recommendations for policymakers include:

- ☞ Create a pro-innovation regulatory and legal environment in their economies
- ☞ Provide financial incentives for transitioning from paper to electronic health records and funding pilot projects
- ☞ Work with the private sector and the health community to ensure interoperability across all points of care
- ☞ Promote regional-national program integration and public-private collaboration to develop guidelines on safety and privacy, interoperable standards, and other rules