Week 2 Assignment -

Impact of Health Information Technology

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Health Information Technology is simply the application of information technology to healthcare. What health information does is use modern, IT systems (computers, applications, etc.) to help provide a comprehensive management network that functions to help serve all parties involved in healthcare – this includes the exchange of information and data between the consumers, providers, government and quality entities, and of course the insurers. This exchange of information is important because it enables health information exchange amongst all these entities. This exchange helps promote the following: improving quality of healthcare, improving efficiency of healthcare, making administrative tasks more streamlined, engaging patients by increasing their involvement and knowledge of their healthcare, and overall supporting community health by allowing coordination with public officials. One of the most meaningful aspects of health information technology is the communication it promotes. By building and utilizing a network of linked IT systems and applications, all of the entities mentioned above have the ability to “instantly” communicate with one another. This ability to utilize technology to communicate helps to improve speed, quality, safety, coordination, and cost of providing healthcare.

Benefits of health information systems and what the technology can provide to the consumer include features like electronic health records (EHRs) – which makes health information available electronically to more easily follow the patient’s history; personal health records (PHRs) – which are similar to EHRs except that the information within them is customizable by the patient and helps the patient to track their own information; E-prescribing – which allows prescriptions to be issued and managed electronically. These are just a few of the tools provided to consumers/patients that illustrate the profound impact that health information technology systems have on healthcare today (HealthIT.gov).

On the clinical side of things, using technology and systems helps in the same types of ways that it helps patients – information is easily input and accessed. In addition, by using these types of applications diagnosis, monitoring, and treatment of patients is very easily achieved and the results are saved reliably as well. In addition, coding and grouping systems are used to identify conditions, as well as perform tests and procedures. Special-purpose applications also exist that helps use health information technology to conduct research, provide education, and even help with some aspects of pharmacy services (Burke, pg. 42). Administrative applications serve as perhaps one of the biggest focuses in utilizing health information technology systems, as administrative services really serve as the backbone of healthcare provision and management. Office management tools, scheduling, and accounting programs are just a few examples of the wide range of services covered via health information technology systems; insurance and claims processing are also achieved through the same types of systems as well now – and just think to yourself how prevalent this is in modern day healthcare!

One of the biggest challenges associated with health information technology is due to the fact that with this vast ability to access a wide range of increasing complex services, there is a need for additional information, skills, and supportive relationships. That is to say that not everyone is able to just access a system and automatically be able to utilize it to its full potential. This is an issue that affects not only patients, but even the healthcare professionals who are not properly trained (many received their healthcare training prior to computer systems being commonplace in the field) to use these types of IT systems. As far as technology has already come in the healthcare field, it is set to only increase and expand further in the field in the coming decade. This means that the speed, scope, and scale of health information technology adoption will increase proportionally as well. This of course means that any challenges (mentioned above) on the part of patients and professionals to understand and utilize the systems will only increase. Another interesting aspect that presents a potential challenge to the field lies in social media and similar technologies/tools (apps, websites, etc.) that blur the line between expert and peer health information. Yes it is good for people to have access to information, but what type of regulation can or will be placed on this type of information?

Ultimately, one of the biggest questions in health information technology systems comes down to a matter of cost. On the one hand, the efficiency of services and extreme capability of technology to provide extensively complex services provides such a positive benefit to all entities involved. We are seeing treatments never before imagined, and this is hard to put any type of price on. But the reality is that these systems cost a lot of money to implement and maintain. This cost is often transferred directly to the consumer, and then we reach a disconnect between the entities. Even if insurance provides a portion of coverage, the remaining cost ends up being so extensive to receive these modern types of services that patients are left unable to pay, or in some type of similar, financially-strained situation. There are also hidden costs such as the cost of training professionals to utilize the systems, and if the systems are not fully utilized then essentially their cost is being somewhat wasted. Ultimately technology does serve as the undisputed basis for what will procure advancement in the healthcare field in the coming years and as Williams (2007) states, “technology is the driving force of health care” (pg. 363). Technology has the power and capability to advance the field to levels we’ve only been able to vaguely imagine thus far and it will continue to push the spectrum of innovation. Utilization, on the other hand, may come down to a matter of finances and who will foot the bill for all of the advances.

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