ONC's Planned Ongoing Role in popHealth

The Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) is currently in the process of transitioning popHealth from being a primarily government-supported and -managed piece of software to one that is primarily supported, developed, and governed by the open source community of users (more background information can be found here).

ONC is transitioning the popHealth tool to the open source community of users because the community has grown to a substantial size and ONC has limited budget to support popHealth in the future. This memo outlines what ONC anticipates its ongoing role will be for activities related to popHealth in the future, given the limited resources available.

1.1 Cypress-Related Role

popHealth shares its quality measures engine with Cypress, the ONC-supported open source tool used for testing and certification of EHRs for electronic clinical quality measures. ONC is committed to continuing to support Cypress, including its quality measures engine, for at least the near future.

As part of its ongoing commitment to Cypress, ONC is committed to engaging with those that use Cypress and its component parts. This may involve one-on-one discussions, group presentations/webinars, and other public communications. If there are any particular decisions that might impact publicly-developed tools, including popHealth, ONC may choose to engage representatives of those respective communities, as is appropriate.

ONC has mechanisms in place to receive input from the public on the EHR Certification Program, specifically the rulemaking process. In fact, ONC recently released a notice of proposed rulemaking for the Voluntary 2015 Edition Electronic Health Record Certification Criteria: Interoperability Updates and Regulatory Improvements. ONC encourages the community to submit comments via Regulations.gov, either as a group or individually. Comments must be received by April 28, 2014 in order to be considered by ONC.

Additionally, ONC has developed its "CQM Issue Tracker," which is used to track issues related to the clinical quality measures (CQMs) in Meaningful Use, including questions on implementation (e.g., the specifications, logic, code sets, measure intent) or policy (e.g., reporting requirements). It can be located at http://jira.oncprojecttracking.org/browse/CQM. ONC is committed to supporting the CQM Issue Tracker for the foreseeable future.

1.1 Promoter of the popHealth tool

ONC wishes for popHealth to flourish as a tool that benefits the electronic CQM (eCQM) ecosystem. With that aim, ONC will promote popHealth and its components as potential tools for health information technology developers and implementers.

ONC will also continue to work with other federal agencies and states to promote the use of popHealth. This is already occurring. For example, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has included popHealth as one potential tool that states can use to support their strategies for receiving eCQMs as part of Meaningful Use Stage 2.

It should be noted, however, that there are limitations to the federal government's ability to promote particular tools. popHealth can generally be promoted as one of multiple potential options, and generally will not be endorsed over other potential tools.

1.2 Governance Participation

ONC will continue to engage with whatever potential governance entity evolves to support the future of popHealth. This engagement could range from only informal interactions along the lines of those outlined above (i.e., one-on-one conversations with relevant staff, presentations on relevant topics, etc.) to more formal interactions (i.e., serving as a liaison to a non-profit board or potentially even serving as a member of such a board). However, at this time, ONC anticipates that this engagement will likely be more informal in nature given resource constraints.

1.3 Quality Measurement Alignment

The Department of Health and Human Services is committed to reducing the burden of data reporting by providers.[1] This work has spanned ONC, CMS, and other federal agencies, including the Health Resources and Services Administration. As the popHealth tool and eCQM ecosystem mature, popHealth can potentially provide a readily available, open source tool to support providers participating in programs beyond Meaningful Use that require eCQMs. ONC will continue to conduct staff engagement with other federal agencies about the existence of popHealth and its potential role.

1.4 "popHealth" Trademark

ONC will continue to engage with the open source community as it considers various options for the future of the "popHealth" trademark.

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[1] See the 2013 Annual Progress Report to Congress: National Strategy for Quality Improvement in Health Care