How will HIT play out in 2018?

According to experts, some of the healthcare technology trends that grabbed the spotlight in the past year are likely to maintain their momentum in 2018, including tech giants' (e.g., Apple and Google) increasing foray into the healthcare industry.

In addition, they say consolidation across several healthcare sectors is creating unique opportunities for health IT that will be fleshed out even further in the coming year. Those changes will give way to new breeding grounds for innovation as regulatory shifts continue to shape the industry.

Here are the top five health IT predictions for 2018:

1. Congress will address telehealth reimbursement

Nine different bills were introduced to the House or the Senate in 2017 that took on telehealth reimbursement in some form or another. But these initiatives were thwarted by some more pressing objectives like tax reform and attempts to repeal the Affordable Care Act. Lawmakers can only delay this issue for so long, especially as public awareness of telehealth builds and health systems continue investing in new platforms. With the industry steadily shifting, it behoves Congress to keep pace.

2. There will be more lawsuits over EHR incentive payments

The $155 million eClinicalWorks settlement broke the proverbial dam and, for sure, attorneys (and prospective whistleblowers) read that complaint and the corporate integrity agreement with keen interest. After handing out billions in incentive payments to hospitals and physician practices to implement EHRs, the federal auditors are taking a closer look at what exactly they paid for. In the eClinicalWorks case, providers were absolved of liability since the vendor falsified testing, but another lawsuit unsealed in November named 62 Indiana hospitals that allegedly submitted fraudulent Meaningful Use attestation data.

Hospital attorneys are already on notice. Corinne Smith, a healthcare attorney at Strasburger & Price in Austin, Texas, who helps hospitals negotiate contracts with EHR vendors, said she has started adding in new provisions requiring developers to upgrade systems free of charge if they are implicated in government charges or certification violations.

3. Data blocking enforcement will emerge as an even more contentious issue

ONC's mandate under the 21st Century Cures Act is to create a definition for data blocking. ONC says it will release that guidance this spring, which will serve as the foundation for the Office of Inspector General to crack down on information blocking. OIG officials said they won't begin issuing fines until ONC has finalised that definition, but the agency has already begun looking into some complaints and referrals. Although some people have argued that data blocking doesn't exist at all, plenty of industry experts have highlighted it as a very real problem — including several ONC officials.

4. Healthcare will battle another cyberattack

Last year, two major attacks impacted industries around the globe. It seems almost inevitable that healthcare will be forced to grapple with another one at some point in the coming year. This is because the industry is still just as vulnerable to an attack as it was this time last year, and it will continue to be hampered by the fact that most providers are operating without any kind of cybersecurity leadership. The vulnerabilities that exist with legacy systems in increasingly connected medical devices aren't going to be fixed overnight.

5. The big 5 technology companies will enter into more partnerships

Apple, Amazon, Google, Facebook and Microsoft are all keen on finding ways to insert themselves into the healthcare industry. And why not? Outfits like Google lead the world in aggregating and distilling massive amounts of data. These tech companies however are unlikely to completely "disrupt" the healthcare industry in the span of a year. What we'll probably see instead is a number of new partnerships with major health systems similar to the one Apple launched with Stanford earlier this year to test its new Apple Watch. The success of those partnerships will drive more collaboration.

Source: FierceHealthcare
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