

Wachter: healthcare complexity means lengthy digitisation process inevitable



Healthcare lags behind other industries when it comes to widespread and effective use of digital tools. That's the observation of Robert Wachter, MD, a healthcare leader who has been critical of health IT's shortcomings.

In most industries, widespread digitisation takes 10 to 15 years, according to Dr. Wachter, the chair of the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) Department of Medicine. He has noted that the complexity of healthcare will lengthen that time frame.

"Healthcare is harder; it will take longer, but I think this is beginning to happen," he said, adding that Google shut down its early attempt to create a medical record because it was simply too difficult.

But the healthcare leader is also seeing some bright spots that leave him optimistic about the future. In his keynote speech at the College of Health Information Management Executives (CHIME) CIO Forum at HIMSS18 in Las Vegas, for instance, Dr. Wachter highlighted how data analytics has helped clinicians at UCSF identify the origins of a deadly infection and allowed a specialist to review glucose data for every patient at the hospital in the time it typically took to do a single consult.

In addition, the doctor defended Meaningful Use and the government's EHR incentive programme, which laid a foundation for healthcare to begin using data more effectively. He called the backlash against the programme "a little bit of revisionist history," noting that 9 out of 10 hospitals have EHRs because of those incentives.

However, Dr. Wachter cited numerous instances in which technology was still failing clinicians. Along the spectrum of four health IT stages — digitised records, connecting various systems, gleaning meaningful insights and creating actions that improve value — he says the industry has only completed the first stage.

Looking into the future, he sees a better version of EHR that includes elements of a Facebook or Twitter feed for patients to easily digest information, built-in artificial intelligence for medical chart and literature reviews and "if there's a God, we'll ditch E&M coding."

Dr. Wachter also had high hopes for the Amazon, JPMorgan and Berkshire Hathaway venture which has the resources to push the industry forward. The joint venture plans to create a healthcare data warehouse. The companies also want to partner with healthcare systems to use technology to care for patients outside of the hospital, along with digital tools that facilitate data sharing.

But he cautioned that healthcare isn't the book industry and didn't think the partnership would eliminate the major EHR companies because of the money that hospitals have already spent to implement those systems. In the future, he believes EHRs will be just a kernel of the entire data system.

Source: [FierceHealthcare](#)

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