The Use of Health Information Technology in Reducing Medical Errors: The Need for a Structured Governance of Standards and Interoperability.

Carl G. Bynum, D.O., M.P.H.
Health Policy Fellowship 2004-2005

Abstract

While medical errors are certainly not new to medicine, a 1999 Institute of Medicine Report (IOM), To Err is Human: Building a Safer Health System, brought the issue into sharper focus. The report concluded that 44,000 to 98,000 people die in hospitals each year because of preventable medical errors. Beyond the cost in human lives, these errors also result in significant economic damage, with estimates in total costs of between $17 billion and $29 billion per year.

Improvement of patient safety can be achieved through a fully functional national health information exchange system based on computerized patient records. Some barriers to overcome include the lack of standardized technology and software, the cost of purchase and implementation, the lack of interoperability between applications, and the issues of security of patient data and safeguarding of patient privacy.

Recommendations include requesting Governor Blunt to create the Missouri Commission on Health Information Exchange to study ways to improve patient safety using health information technology (HIT) and to seek state and federal funding. Based on the results of the Exchange, the state should establish Regional Health Information Organizations (RHIO) to develop the financing, business rules, technology, and governance structure necessary to permit providers and healthcare systems to share electronic patient information in a defined community or region.