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Developing a Health IT Academy in the Heart of Texas
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Not having doctors prepared to use clinical IT systems can be a vital mistake.

Just ask the leaders at Athens (Ga.) Regional Health Systems, where a botched electronic medical record (EMR) rollout cost two executives their jobs. In that case, doctors said the EMR rollout was too aggressive and they rebelled. Things might have gone a little smoother in Athens had there been an extensive doctor training program on the systems involved.

At Texas A&M Health Science Center (TAMHSC), leaders understand that one of the major causes to a failed EMR rollout is lack of physician training. In fact, a 2013 HIMSS Analytics study found that inadequate training was the most significant roadblock to achieving meaningful use of EMRs. In a survey of 300 hospitals, HIMSS Analytics found that 77 percent were unable to leverage the system for meaningful use because of a poorly trained medical staff.

TAMHSC recently teamed up with the Round Rock, Texas-based Dell to attempt to tackle this industrywide problem. The two organizations are starting an academy that will educate current physicians on the value of health information technology. It will also train them extensively on how to get the most out of an EMR and other clinical IT systems.

Healthcare Informatics Senior Editor Gabriel recently got a chance to speak with Paul Ogden, M.D., the interim dean of the College of Medicine at TAMHSC, to discuss the initiative and why it's vital in today's rapidly changing environment. Below are excepts from that interview.

What brought on this initiative?

We were both interested in health information technology, particularly as it relates to physicians and the practice of medicine. Our medical school is interested in improving the practice of medicine and healthcare delivery. Dell is very good at educating physicians on health IT. We felt that was a good partnership between the two of us. Also, because of the nature of our university, we have significant strengths in industrial engineering, public health, medicine, nursing, and the school of government. There are lot of things that Dell thought that would be good collaborations going forward.

Why do you think health IT is an important area to train doctors in?

I come to this as a practicing physician for 24 years. The office practice of medicine has not kept up with health IT very well. It's largely because physicians are very busy trying to take care of the problem that's in front of them, usually a patient or a very difficult case. The management of their practice and the management of their office, usually defaults to "What did I know and what am I comfortable with?" So the ability to learn something new, particularly something that will make their practice more efficient, is not readily available to most physicians and they tend to revert to a method that is old and outdated. Dell, because of their training and their platforms, has a lot of training modules for practicing physicians that can greatly improve the efficiency of practice and make life easier for them.The other thing, the physician workforce, at least half of it, is a bit older and less comfortable with technology.

Why do you think many healthcare professionals haven't been up to par so far on IT?

It's partly time, it's partly age of the folks and their comfort with technology, and it's partly expense to an extent. If you are running a practice or are part of a bigger practice, you get stuck in a rut because have to buy new equipment and new IT. A lot of practices keep outdated stuff longer than they should because they are worried about the expense. It's common to go into a doctor's office to see computers that should have been sent to the recycling bin.

Why is Texas A&M the right place for this initiative?

Some of it's location. We have a campus in Round Rock, which is near the the Dell headquarters. That was the first part. We eventually want to probably expand on the relationship and have a physical practice for this academy on our campus in Round Rock, which is probably 2-3 miles away from Dell. The other part of it is Texas A&M in Bryan-College Station, where I am, is a top 20 national research institute. There are the opportunities our university brings as one of major universities in the State of Texas.

Where is the training happening - in person or online?

A lot of training will take place online. We eventually will have some live training on our campus. We'd like to have an academy to work on this as well as research. We are interested in finding out how you can use technology to keep people healthy much better than we currently do.

What kinds of education will be taught to healthcare professionals on IT?

Right now, Dell has 400 training modules. The first order of business is to take those modules and turn them into continuing medical education (CME) modules for the physicians. In order to do that, there are certain requirements that have to be met and we'll have to go through our CME granting process. Once those are up and available, physicians will be able take those anywhere in the world and get CME credit. Physicians have to do that to maintain their licenses. As we move along, we'll be developing actual courses that you'd see at the university on health IT. We might

get to the point where we may have minors and degree programs around health IT available to students.

How do you plan on recruiting physicians?

Well, I'm not 100 percent sure. I know Dell has a lot of physicians who are connected with them now. People who are connected with Dell Healthcare are ready. They have asked Dell to come in and help them with their IT problems. The initial connection will be through Dell. We will have connections as well, through faculty and our extended network and people who want to do things with us because it's Texas A&M. There will be synergies between the two.

Will you get them to better understand how to use IT systems like EMR and telemedicine? Will it be that specific or more of a general course?

All of the above. The initial focus will be on using an EMR in the office practice. But anything has to do with technology should be a part of this training.

What is the overall goal for the partnership and initiative?

I would like to change the way we practice medicine in the US. I think the way we currently practice medicine is inefficient and unsustainable. As we're making major changes nationally in the way we practice medicine, I don't think we can't deliver it effectively. Even if the rollout of the Affordable Care Act was perfect and everyone signed up and it was working wonderfully, I don't think we can deliver care to the people that signed up. We don't have enough primary care physicians, and the [healthcare] networks don't work together. Someone can go to three different doctors in the same town and be on three different EMRs. They don't talk and there is little information flowing back and forth. My ultimate goal is to create a better and more efficient system centered around the patient: one that promotes patient empowerment to stay at home, physician empowerment to use data correctly, keeps people healthy and well, and allows us to take care of larger populations of patients better than we do.