

## Operationally Defining Goals Critical to Achieving Success

### PART I

The healthcare community is in the center of a vortex of competing demands and conflicting pressures. Forces of change are coming from all directions as hospital administrators are trying to make sense of regulatory mandates, competing standards, major changes in the structure of reimbursements, regional health initiatives, increasing costs, operational inefficiencies and vendors clamoring at their doors promising solutions that will fix all existing and future problems.

The bottom line is that the rules have changed and everything you thought you knew is not enough. These are extraordinary times and hospital leaders are now facing complex decisions that will have substantial implications for the next ten to fifteen years. Of course, hospital administrators have always had to make decisions that have had significant implications for the future, so what's different about today's issues?

The simple answer is that everything is different because the stakes have been ratcheted up to the point where failure can be catastrophic for the facility and the administrator. Incomplete or inaccurate information, resulting in faulty decisions and errors in judgment, cannot be easily accommodated when their interrelationship impacts the fundamental operating processes of the entire hospital or health system.

The electronic health record, patient safety, pay for performance, RHIOs, interoperability and operational demands are just a few of the interdependent issues confronting healthcare administrators today. It is significant to note that the relationship between each of these issues is what raises the decision-making stakes to



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inexorable levels.

The bottom line is that evolving technologies, not carbon-based molecules, form the fundamental elements needed to create the building blocks of the future. Finding solutions to the demands and pressures confronting hospitals and health systems today will require an astute understanding of process and technology interdependencies.

For example, electronic systems to track the administration of medications to hospitalized patients are very popular today because they provide a quickly implemented and cost effective mechanism to reduce errors and improve patient safety. However, selecting an electronic system to track the medication administration without considering it as an integral part of a comprehensive hospital-wide strategy is like buying a film-based camera.

It'll take great pictures, but if you want to share those pictures quickly and cost

effectively to those not sitting nearby, or you want to integrate them into a presentation or electronic album, you might find it to be more efficient and economical to ditch the film camera and buy a new digital one.

The problem is that electronic medication administration systems don't work in a vacuum; to achieve any sort of effectiveness they require integration with the hospital's pharmacy system.

However, once you determine that the selected system will work with your existing pharmacy system, the question now becomes more complex as you try to determine if other electronic information systems being contemplated will effectively work with your existing systems.

The answer is...probably not. So, the point becomes... where do you begin? Should you start with the purchase of a single electronic system then continue to buy more systems or should you define your operational goals and understand what you are trying to accomplish in total before you make any buying decisions?

It's sort of like trying to decide how to decorate a newly built house: Where do you begin the process... wall color, carpeting, furniture, curtains? How do you keep from choosing a wall color only to realize a few months later that it really doesn't work with your new furniture or countertops or even with your evolving vision?

Therefore, having a clear vision of what you want to ultimately accomplish is a critical first step to ensure everything will work together... without the necessity of going back and reworking and or removing something that was already done.

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