Best Practices for Healthcare Data Governance

An effective data governance strategy helps healthcare organizations manage, use, and protect the data in their IT environments. Data governance is also at the heart of establishing an effective analytics program. The ability to trust, efficiently use, and manage data, allows the organization to impact outcomes by performing reliable statistical and qualitative analysis, as well as explanatory and predictive modeling. However, designing and implementing a successful data governance foundation requires far more than a plug-and-play technology solution. A viable, holistic strategy requires the expertise of professionals with practical data governance experience.

An effective strategy helps to create a culture of data-driven decision-making by putting reliable information in the hands of information consumers in a timely manner. On the other hand, an ineffective strategy wastes time and resources, delays progress, blunts your competitive edge, and can even damage your brand.

Data governance is critical to the health of your organization, but the do-it-yourself approach to implementing a data governance framework has proven difficult, ineffective, and frustrating for healthcare IT managers and CIOs—and for good reason. Lack of knowledge, lack of leadership support, big data, data inconsistencies, data silos, and questions about stewardship add even more complexity. Fortunately, there are effective approaches to implementing data governance that can be implemented quickly and without large investments in technology or additional staff.

Why Data Governance Is a Critical Component of Analytics

By definition, data governance is the foundation for organizing and managing data and information assets across the enterprise.

Data governance provides organizations with a means to integrate both clinical and business policy requirements, and it gives quality information to those in leadership positions, allowing them to make timely decisions for continuous improvement through analytics.

In today’s health practices, analytics is the bridge between information and evidence-driven decisions, so this ability is critical to the success of a provider organization. Data governance provides the framework for defining the information included in an analytics environment and guides the process so that consumers can properly interpret and use it.

Data collected in healthcare organizations is a valuable resource that can help control costs, predict future trends and requirements, and measure performance and outcomes. For example, value-based reimbursement has now increased the importance of data owned by healthcare organizations. As a result, data is no longer just an asset to the organization; it is critical to providing quality care and ensuring desirable outcomes.
6 Data Governance Challenges in Healthcare

Establishing data governance best practices has been a challenge for health providers for several reasons, including:

- Lack of executive and board support for a holistic foundation
- Significant staff bandwidth required of members of a governance committee, including executives, service leaders, data owners, data stewards, data architects, and data analysts
- Data owners are too far removed from operations and business activities to be effectively integrated into the solution
- Siloed, inaccurate, inconsistent, and unstandardized data results in lack of trust
- Lack of strategy for educating, training, and supporting users on data governance practices
- Lack of appropriate, consistent data access, restrictions, and protections

Because these challenges are often new to leadership, even the most experienced CIOs and IT managers don’t know how to create an efficient, effective strategy because there’s no mechanism for training or experience. As a result, they end up wasting time and resources, which has negative impacts on the organization and can damage the brand. At the same time, IT has no way to perform analysis on the data residing in the organization’s systems in any meaningful way.

The knee-jerk reaction is to plug in a technology solution in an effort to solve the problem quickly. However, jumping directly to a technology solution in the hopes of finding that “silver bullet” can backfire. Plug-and-play solutions aren’t enough—data governance requires a strategy. You can’t make progress toward creating a learning health system without laying a solid foundation of information. And a data governance strategy is the ante to play.

3 Best Practices for Data Governance

Data governance helps the organization start to move in the right direction and keeps the focus on the highest priorities. However, data governance is also part of a larger set of processes that includes design, implementation, deployment, knowledge transfer, monitoring and assessment, and more. As you proceed with your data governance initiative, here are three best practices to consider:

No. 1: Get Your Master Data Act Together

Standardize master data such as diagnostic codes, clinician codes, and facility codes across all systems. Agree on and adhere to coding standards throughout the organization. Centrally maintain local codes using a system that ensures there is no duplication or ambiguity between elements. Data standardization and management is an important role of information governance, but it can be difficult because all specialties are not catered to equally in all national or industry coding standards. Investing thought and time into standardization upfront will ensure higher quality information down the road and avoid the frustration of incoherent data.

No. 2: Provide Access and Encourage Data Literacy

The primary benefit of your data governance efforts is useful information that can be used to make data-driven decisions. But how do you make that a reality? A few basics to start:

- Provide enough information so that consumers can navigate to their own insights
- Surround the information with context that aids in interpretation
- Build definitions and other helpful documentation directly into your analytics environment

Don’t forget knowledge transfer to help information consumers get started. Online examples and explanations can be even more effective than in-person training since they are always available. But there’s nothing like a personal touch from time to time. The practice of “ask the expert” has also shown promise. In these sessions, users enter a question on a particular subject and get a response (ideally very quickly) from an expert in that area who understands both the information and how it is intended to be used.

No. 3: Determine the Single Source of Truth

The only thing more frustrating than getting multiple answers to the same question is having to argue about which answer is right. However, if you use your data governance processes to determine both the
definitive source of information and the rules and definitions that apply—upfront—you can reduce the instances of “multiple choice.”

Because healthcare information is recorded across many platforms and technologies, including stand alone, siloed databases, large multi-purpose EHRs, and mobile and handheld technology, integrating data is key to producing and maintaining one version of the truth. Data governance must control and dictate the data integration policies for the whole organization.

Engaging an Expert for Success
The good news is that it is possible to implement a powerfully efficient and effective data governance framework without a massive investment in time or staff resources. An effective data governance framework gets useful information into the hands of people who can do something with it, creates a culture of data- and evidence-driven decision making, and gives leadership a platform to build skills. It also serves as a bridge to a learning health system by providing a vehicle for continuous improvement and innovation, ensuring data integrity, and automating best practices.

Creating the foundation actually doesn’t have to be hard; in fact, keeping it simple in the beginning can help shorten the path to reliable and useful information. An experienced professional can help you start at the right place and guide you through a maze of potential missteps. An independent facilitator can also help you work with the stakeholders in your organization to set priorities and focus on the information that will best help you reach the goals you’ve set for the organization.

A facilitator can help transfer best practices across organizations, emphasizing what works and guiding clients around the trouble spots that have bogged down initiatives at other organizations.

Dimensional Insight HealthcareAware
Dimensional Insight’s HealthcareAware framework incorporates data integration, data validation, a business rules engine, and user-ready views under a single solution set. HealthcareAware includes everything a health system needs to excel on its BI journey, and can provide a project-based entry point determined by your current level of readiness. Dimensional Insight experts have in-depth experience designing data governance frameworks, and can help your organization quickly establish effective, cost- and resource-efficient data governance processes.

An effective data governance strategy is at the heart of an organization’s ability to use, manage and protect data, affect outcomes, and create a meaningful analytics program. However, the do-it-yourself strategy has proven challenging for organizations already strapped for cash and staff resources. HealthcareAware is a holistic approach to creating a simple, affordable data governance framework that can help health practices succeed in an evolving competitive and technology landscape.

About Dimensional Insight
Dimensional Insight is a leading provider of business intelligence (BI) solutions. The company offers a comprehensive set of BI capabilities to companies that operate in highly regulated and complex industries including healthcare.

Dimensional Insight was named 2014 “Best in KLAS” in business intelligence and analytics by KLAS Research, and is a four-time winner of the award. The company provides data integration, reporting, analytics, and dashboard capabilities embedded in its core BI platform as well as a portfolio of analytics focused applications. Founded in 1989, Dimensional Insight has thousands of customer organizations worldwide and consistently ranks as a top performing business intelligence platform by customers and industry analysts in its core market segments.

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