

HIMSS17 recap - A look at the past, present and future of healthcare

Written by George Dealy, VP of healthcare applications, Dimensional Insight | March 14, 2017

After months of planning and preparation, HIMSS17 came and went within a blink of an eye. Healthcare IT leaders spent four fully-packed days immersed in education sessions, speaking seminars and networking events all with a goal of leaving the show floor more informed and inspired than before.

The number of topics and technologies presented at this year's conference were limitless; everything from blockchain to FHIR, precision medicine to population health were major themes for 2017.

Still, when looking back at the conference in its entirety, three major takeaways stand out among the masses, particularly around where the industry has been, where we currently are and where we will be through continued innovation. As stated by IBM CEO (and HIMSS17 keynote speaker) Ginnie Rometty, "We're in a moment when we can actually transform pieces of healthcare; it's within our power. This era that will play out in front of us can change the world for the better."

Here are the top three takeaways from HIMSS17:

- **Artificial Intelligence:** Artificial intelligence put a major stake in the ground within the healthcare industry when IBM introduced its new Watson technology. The artificial intelligence capability is built to interpret medical images, assist with genomics and cancer diagnoses, and even treat certain patient conditions where the number of doctors is scarce. As a primary proof point of the value that innovative technologies can bring to healthcare, the HIMSS floor buzzed with excitement about the promise of AI and what it could mean for the

future of care delivery. In his address to CHIME executives, Dr. Joel Selanikio, CEO of Magpi, surmised that consumer oriented health tools employing AI-based capabilities will likely begin to shift the lion's share of "health" away from the healthcare industry – dramatically lowering requirements for doctors, nurses and other staff noted to the audience that AI-based tools will become increasingly indispensable to physicians on the new frontier to disease diagnosis and treatment. This idea is already coming to fruition with a recent [report](#) released by CBinsights finding that more than 90 healthcare companies are already utilizing machine learning in their day-to-day practices. Frost & Sullivan analyst Harpreet Singh Buttar has also stated, "By 2025, AI systems could be involved in everything from population health management, to digital avatars capable of answering specific patient queries." While the full potential of artificial intelligence in healthcare is still being realized, it is clear that this capability has already made a name for itself within healthcare.

- **Interoperability:** After years of being referred to as one of the biggest IT challenges in healthcare, the HIMSS community agreed that interoperability has finally started to become a reality. According to [recent data](#) from ONC, 52 percent of hospitals can electronically find patient health information, 85 percent can send patient summary of care records, 65 percent can receive these records and 38 percent can use or integrate those records into their own EHRs without manual entry as of 2015. Industry-wide support for the HL7 FHIR standard was another major theme at HIMSS17, where HIT vendors across the showfloor touted their recognitions of being FHIR-compatible. Healthcare entities have now begun integrating FHIR-based interfaces into their products enabling different technologies to seamlessly communicate with one another and analyze data across institutions. The HIMSS Interoperability Showcase was another primary example of this, displaying the exchange and use of clinical data from a number of disparate systems to thousands of show attendees. Similar capabilities will continue to be introduced to the healthcare industry as we move to a more connected ecosystems, particularly under value-based care models.

● **Health Innovation of Tomorrow:** While acknowledging the past successes of the healthcare industry, this year's HIMSS event still emphasized the need to embrace innovation across the industry, focusing specifically on what is needed to help catapult healthcare into a higher level of care delivery while keeping escalating care costs down. With the technology adoption challenges brought on by meaningful use now overcome, the industry is well on its way to being more comfortable with the day-to-day use of healthcare IT. However, the argument can be made that we still need to focus on improving end-user satisfaction with the current healthcare IT capabilities before we shift our focus to the next era of IT innovation. In a HIMMS-facilitated "fireside chat," former CMS administrator, Andy Slavitt, criticized the HIT industry for focusing on innovation "hype" rather than satisfying its customers, making the point that innovation for the sake of innovation is not how the industry will succeed moving forward. Working for a company that prides itself on customer satisfaction, I could not agree more with this statement. Healthcare should keep its focus on improving what is already there first and foremost.

All in all, HIMSS17 was both a celebration of what the healthcare industry has accomplished over the past few years and a call to embrace new innovations that promise to usher in disruptive changes in healthcare. These changes are likely inevitable and are coming all too quickly. I look forward to seeing how the current and future technologies will impact the industry in the months ahead.

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