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The No. 1 CIO Challenge

By Zack Martin
Managing Editor

CIOs focus on data access, reducing errors

Health care CIOs and other I.T. leaders plan to sink more money into applications that increase clinician data access and help reduce medical errors, according to the 2007 *Health Data Management* CIO Survey.

Of those respondents who expect their I.T. budgets to increase in fiscal 2007, 51% said the primary factor for those budget increases is to purchase technology that increases clinician access to information. Another 27% said their budgets will increase primarily to acquire technology that improves patient safety and clinical quality.

"It is gratifying to know that the need to provide automation to clinicians is still a top agenda item," says Becky Quammen, founder and president at The Quammen Group, the Winter Park, Fla.-based health care information technology consulting firm that sponsored the survey. "This stuff is hard to do, very expensive and the projects run months if not years—and it's very easy to get distracted or to divert funds to other capital requirements."

In January *Health Data Management* e-mailed the survey to a sampling of subscribers who work at hospitals, integrated delivery systems or physician group practices, and have the title of CIO/vice president of information systems; director/manager of data processing/I.T./I.S.; medical director of informatics;

director/manager of medical records; or group practice administrator. *Health Data Management* received 150 responses.

The survey results show that the trend of focusing on I.T. initiatives for nurses is continuing. Eighty-four percent of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that nursing I.T. has become a top priority at their facilities.

"With the industry focus on patient safety, it has become clear that the nucleus of activity surrounding a patient's hospital stay is the nursing care and yet much of the daily nursing process remains manual and paper driven," Quammen says. "Organizations are working to change this, and the nursing staffs at many facilities now appear to be ready and willing to embrace technology."

The top software priority in 2007 for both hospitals and group practices is implementing electronic medical records, the survey found. But for all the hubbub surrounding industry certification of EMRs, survey results indicate that certification is not as important as vendors and some industry experts think.

Only 28% of respondents said that certification by the Certification Commission for Healthcare Information Technology will carry weight in their EMR selection process. Forty-two percent of respondents were unaware of CCHIT certification efforts, and 30% said that certification will only be meaningful once the program has matured.

The CCHIT is an industry-sponsored initiative that has been designated as a "recognized certification body" by the Department of Health and Human Services. The commission to date has certified 35 ambulatory electronic records systems as meeting specific criteria for functionality, interoperability and security/reliability.

The responses do not surprise Quammen. "There are so many initiatives underway in the health care industry that it is hard for any of them to gain consistent audience and traction," she says. "Many folks find the alphabet soup of programs hard to keep up with and even harder to relate to in their daily work."

"I have heard many anecdotal conversations in recent months that the CCHIT certification may provide one element of information in an organization's evaluation of systems but that it is not a comprehensive or accurate barometer of a vendor's ability to perform in a particular setting. Many discuss the need for the CCHIT to mature and many vendors talk about the cost of re-certifying each year as new criteria is developed."

Full results of the survey are available at www.healthdatamanagement.com.

How do you view CCHIT (Certification Commission for Healthcare Information Technology) certification of software and networks?

