

The Wisconsin Health Information Organization

Julie Bartels

The Wisconsin Health Information Organization (WHIO) is an information-sharing business entity focused on improving quality, affordability, safety, and efficiency in health care. It is intended to support both patients and health care professionals by delivering transparent and comparable data in an easy-to-access and easy-to-understand method. The information provided will support consumer and purchaser value-based health care buying decisions. Providers will be able to measure their own performance, introduce improvements, and track the results of those process improvements over time.

WHIO will drive change in the health care system in Wisconsin by following classic quality improvement methods: performance tracking, followed by analysis or benchmarking, and, finally, reporting performance results as compared to the benchmark.

What makes WHIO unique is the powerful partnership between providers, payors, and purchasers and the sheer volume of data that will be collected and shared. Millions of data points spanning multiple calendar years, multiple providers, and multiple health plans will support attribution of efficiency and cost reporting in a way that has been impossible

to achieve prior to the creation of the data warehouse. For the first time, statistically valid reporting on the cost and efficiency of an episode of care can be provided at a very detailed level.

The data warehouse will hold 3 years of administrative claims collected from the major health plans in the state. BCBS/Anthem, Humana, The Alliance, United Health Care, and Wisconsin Physicians Service will submit their claims data to the WHIO data warehouse. Medicaid and Medicare claims will be added in the future, as will data from other regional health plans. The greater the number of contributors to the database, the more accurate the reporting of episodic care will be.

The Wisconsin Health Information Organization is a collaborative effort that includes private industry and the state of Wisconsin. The Departments of Health and Family Services and Employee Trust Funds are founding members, as are WEA Trust and Business Group on Health Care. The Wisconsin Collaborative for Healthcare Quality, the Wisconsin Hospital Association, and the Wisconsin Medical Society are founding members that bring health care professionals' perspective into the effort.

Planning meetings and organizational work began early in 2005. The Wisconsin Health Information Organization was incorporated in August of that year. Work in 2006 has clarified the focus of the project, gathered membership that appro-

priately represents a balance of provider, purchaser, and payor interests, and formalized its existence through funding commitments and all the necessary filings. I was brought on board in October as Executive Director.

Current activity is focused on the selection of a software vendor to host the development and maintenance of the data warehouse and to work with members on the metric calculation and reporting tools.

The Physicians Cabinet, an offshoot of the Wisconsin Medical Society Quality Forum, will play a significant role in helping WHIO determine performance metrics and set guidelines for reporting. Their immediate challenge will be to work through such issues as patient attribution and defining an episode of care for measurement purposes. These are big issues that require a lot of thought and discussion. Members of this committee are making a significant time commitment to help assure WHIO data is transformed into meaningful information that will be of value to practicing physicians who want to first, understand and then, improve their quality of care.

The project has an aggressive timetable that calls for selection of the vendor by year end 2006 and major project implementation—as well as performance measurement development throughout 2007. First data warehouse loads are anticipated mid-year with full audit and data verification during 3rd and 4th quarter. The first reports are expected in early 2008.

Ms Bartels joined WHIO as Executive Director in 2006. Bartels previously held senior leadership roles at Employer's Health Insurance (Humana) and American Medical Security (United Health Care).

Wisconsin Medical Journal

The mission of the *Wisconsin Medical Journal* is to provide a vehicle for professional communication and continuing education of Wisconsin physicians.

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