

AAMA Membership Survey Points to the Importance of Workflow Redesign When Implementing Information Technology Systems

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Information Technology has the power to revolutionize the delivery of medical care.

However, despite the availability of a vast array of IT solutions, hospitals and cardiovascular programs, in particular, have been slow in adopting the technology. In November, 2002, the AAMA, in conjunction with the GE Medical Systems Performance Solutions conducted a membership survey for the purpose of gaining insight into factors hospital leaders viewed critical to successful IT implementation. The electronic survey covered four areas: IT strategic planning, criteria used to judge successful IT implementation, IT impact on workflow, and members need for external assistance with various IT project components. Unfortunately, only 82 responses were received- divided almost equally between AAMA and ACCA members. Respondents comprised approximately 4 % of ACCA members but only 2 % of the AAMA membership. While definitive conclusions cannot be drawn due to the low response rate, the survey did provide insights into the importance and challenges of cultural acceptance for successful integration of information technology into the organization.

98% of the survey respondents indicated a comprehensive clinical IT plan was important and consequently, it was not surprising that the majority of respondents indicated their organizations had developed a multidepartmental integrated IT strategy. When asked to

rank a set of nine criteria that could be used to describe a successful IT implementation, respondents listed the following in order of importance:

- Improvements in workflow efficiency
- Clinical acceptance
- Clinicians perceive improvements in quality of care
- Staff satisfaction improved
- Project completed within budget
- Patient satisfaction improved
- Revenue improvements
- Demonstrated cost savings
- Project completed on time

However, despite the importance members placed on workflow improvements, responses to subsequent questions indicate members struggle with planning, preparing and executing workflow changes. Only 28% responded favorably to the statement: “Historical IT implementation includes a clear identification of desired system functionality *PRIOR* to purchase,” indicating that hospitals may be struggling with envisioning how information technology could improve the current state of their operations. While a definitive conclusion as to the reason respondents are *not* considering functionality in system selection cannot be drawn, one reason may be that respondents do not fully understand the features and functionality available through commercialized products. What is most troubling about this response is, that the absence of a clear

understanding of desired functionality prior to purchase may lead to future disappointment with the product. The system may perform “as designed”, but may not possess the features desired by the customer. Long term this may result in expensive customization to retro-fit the product to meet the hospital’s needs, the purchase of additional “niche” systems, or strained relationships between the hospital and vendor.

Challenges around adapting workflow to fit technology also surfaced in the responses to other questions. 37% of the respondents indicated that successful IT implementation has been hampered by workflow change in their organization and half felt that external assistance with change was desirable. It has been our experience at GE Medical Systems, that effective and sustained performance improvement is directly, related to both the quality (Q) of a particular solution – in this case the hardware and software, and the acceptance (A) of the change by those whom it affects. The technology may offer the organization the ideal capability to enhance patient care delivery, improve customer service, and gain operational efficiencies. However, if the technology is not fully utilized, the organization will not realize all the potential benefits. Indeed, full utilization of the features and functionality of information technology is essential to maximizing the return on, what is usually, a significant capital investment.

Information Technology has the power to revolutionize the delivery of medical care. However, successful widespread adoption of information technology demands more than superior hardware and software. Success requires a culture in which clinicians and administrators embrace the change created by technology and incorporate it into their

daily work environment. The AAMA membership survey points to the need for a close and collaborative relationship between software manufactures and hospitals in the creation of such a culture. It is evident from the survey that hospitals are seeking external assistance in understanding the capability of information technology and envisioning how it can be successfully applied within their own organizations. While there are many sources for such information, software vendors and manufactures are uniquely positioned to assist hospitals understand the current and future IT capability and how this can be applied to their own organizations.

*Marie Weissman, MSW, MBA, will present a session at the 46th AAMA Annual Conference November 13-15, 2003 at the Adam's Mark San Antonio Riverwalk, San Antonio, TX. Included in the Healthcare Information Administration track, it is titled **IT Revolutionizes Delivery of Healthcare: Understanding Cultural Issues for Successful Implementation**. For more AAMA conference information, go to www.aameda.org.*

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