



Interoperability and Data Sharing in Credentialing, Privileging, and Peer Review



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Sara Cameron serves as the Senior Director of Professional Services and a Senior Consultant at The Hardenbergh Group, bringing over 20 years of rich experience in healthcare administration, Medical Staff Services, and Graduate Medical Education. Throughout her career, she has partnered with large health systems to implement best practices in credentialing, privileging, peer review, professional development, and performance improvement.

Sara has made a significant impact by designing and implementing comprehensive professional practice evaluations and clinical peer review systems that enhance healthcare quality. Her efforts in establishing a central verification office enabled the standardization of credentialing practices across nine hospitals, leading to improved governance and efficiency. Through her innovative approach, she has fostered a culture focused on opportunities for improvement, effectively reducing complication rates, lengths of stay, and emergency department readmissions.

Additionally, Sara has been instrumental in transitioning organizations to electronic medical records and paperless credentialing processes. She has developed robust onboarding and orientation programs for physicians and medical staff leaders, ensuring they are well-equipped to tackle the challenges in healthcare.

A graduate of the NAMSS Leadership Certificate Program, Sara is an engaged leader within the National Association of Medical Staff Services (NAMSS), where she has held various volunteer and elected roles, including committee positions and board membership. Passionate about education, she has delivered extensive training sessions and authored several publications on medical staff leadership, making a lasting impact in the healthcare community.

Interoperability and data sharing are becoming crucial components in the healthcare landscape, with significant implications for credentialing and privileging processes. As healthcare systems increasingly utilize electronic health records (EHRs) and digital platforms, the ability to share accurate and timely data across different systems enhances collaboration among providers and improves patient care. Effective data sharing facilitates streamlined verification of provider credentials, reduces duplication of efforts, and ensures that healthcare professionals maintain current privileges. By embracing interoperability, Medical Services Professionals can enhance their

Objectives:

1. Define interoperability in the context of healthcare and explain its significance for data sharing across various health systems.
2. Evaluate how enhanced data sharing influences credentialing and privileging practices, leading to more efficient processes and improved accuracy.
3. Identify strategies and best practices for integrating interoperability into medical staff services to optimize credentialing workflows and maintain compliance.

Understanding Interoperability and Its

Interoperability refers to the ability of different healthcare information systems, devices, and applications to communicate, exchange, and interpret shared data seamlessly. This includes sharing information across various platforms, enhancing collaboration among providers.

Foundational Interoperability: This is the basic level of interoperability that allows the exchange of data between different systems without requiring any specific context or meaning. It enables systems to transmit data but does not ensure any knowledge of what the data represents.

Structural Interoperability: This level ensures that the data exchanged is organized in a recognizable format and structure, allowing different systems to interpret the data correctly. This includes standards such as HL7 and FHIR, which define how data should be formatted.

Semantic Interoperability: This is the highest level of interoperability, where the meaning of the data is fully shared and understood across systems. It facilitates not only data exchange but also the interpretation of the data, enabling users to derive meaningful insights and maintain consistent understanding irrespective of the platforms used.



Significance of Interoperabilit



Interoperability enhances patient care by providing healthcare professionals with timely access to accurate and comprehensive patient and provider information. This leads to better collaboration among providers, informed decision-making, and reduced duplication of services.

In the contexts of credentialing, privileging, and peer review, interoperability allows for the seamless sharing of necessary data (such as provider qualifications, privileges, and performance metrics) across different systems and facilities. This efficiency not only streamlines processes but also supports compliance with regulatory standards and enhances the overall quality of care delivered.

Benefits of Enhanced Data Sharing



Enhanced Patient Care:

Seamless access to comprehensive patient information enables healthcare professionals to make informed decisions, leading to improved clinical outcomes and enhanced patient safety.

Streamlined Credentialing and Privileging Processes:

Interoperability allows for quicker verification of provider credentials and privileges, reducing administrative burdens and accelerating onboarding processes for new healthcare professionals.

Improved Efficiency and Reduced Redundancy:

Data sharing minimizes duplication of efforts across departments, allowing Medical Staff Services Professionals to focus on strategic tasks rather than repetitive data entry and verification.


Compliance with Regulatory Standards:

Enhanced interoperability supports adherence to evolving regulatory and accreditation requirements, ensuring that healthcare organizations maintain compliance and mitigate risks associated with legal liabilities.

Fostering Collaboration and Communication:

Strong data sharing practices promote better collaboration and communication among providers, departments, and facilities, leading to a more cohesive approach to patient care and quality improvement.

Influence on Credentialing and Privileging



CREDENTIALING & PRIVILEGING

Rapid Verification of Credentials:

Interoperability facilitates real-time access to verified credentialing information, enabling faster confirmation of a provider's qualifications, training, and certifications, which is essential for timely onboarding.

Consistency in Privileging Decisions:

Enhanced data sharing ensures that privileging decisions are based on accurate and current information, reducing discrepancies and improving the integrity of provider privileges granted across different facilities.

Streamlined Processes:

With integrated systems, the credentialing and privileging workflows become more efficient, minimizing administrative burdens and reducing the

Influence on Credentialing and Privileging



Centralized Data Management:

Interoperability allows for centralized management of credentialing and privileging data, ensuring that all stakeholders have access to the same up-to-date information, which supports compliance and enhances collaboration among departments.

Support for Regulatory Compliance:

Effective interoperability aids in maintaining compliance with state and federal regulations surrounding credentialing and privileging, helping organizations avoid legal risks and fostering a culture of accountability in healthcare practices.

CASE STUDIES in Interoperability and Data Sharing

CASE STUDY

Credentialing

Background

Health System is a multi-facility healthcare organization that struggles with delays in the credentialing process due to fragmented data systems across its different facilities. Each facility maintained its own databases for provider credentials, which led to duplicative efforts, inconsistencies, and extended onboarding times for new hires.

Implementation

To address these challenges, Health System A implemented an interoperable electronic credentialing platform that allowed for seamless data sharing across its facilities. By establishing standardized data entry fields and integrating with existing EHR systems, the organization ensured that all facilities could access real-time credentialing information.

CASE STUDY

Credentialing



As a result of these changes, the Health System significantly reduced the average time to credential providers from 120 days to 45 days. The streamlined process improved the accuracy of credentialing information, decreased administrative burdens, and increased physician satisfaction. Moreover, the organization ensured compliance with legal requirements for sharing credentials under state and federal regulations, thereby minimizing liability risks.

CASE STUDY

Privileging

Background

Community Hospital B faced challenges in updating and managing privilege lists for physicians and allied health professionals due to inconsistent communication and data sharing between departments. This led to outdated privileging information, which not only hindered quality patient care but also posed legal risks associated with granting privileges based on inaccurate data.

Implementation

The hospital adopted an interoperable platform that connected its credentialing and clinical governance systems. This integration allowed real-time updates to privilege lists, enabling automatic notifications to relevant stakeholders whenever a provider's skills, training, or certifications changed.

CASE STUDY



With the new interoperable system in place, Community Hospital B improved the accuracy and currency of its privileging data. The time taken to process privilege requests decreased by 50%, and the hospital maintained compliance with accreditation and regulatory standards. By ensuring that privileges were consistently updated, the hospital minimized the risk of legal liabilities arising from granting privileges based on outdated credentials.

CASE STUDY

Background

Regional Medical Center C had a segmented approach to peer review, with different departments using varied systems to document and assess clinician performance. This lack of a unified data-sharing solution resulted in delays in peer review processes and made it difficult to provide a comprehensive assessment of provider performance, thus increasing risks associated with legal challenges.

Implementation

The medical center integrated its peer review processes into a centralized electronic platform that allowed for interoperability across departments. This platform included functionalities for secure data sharing, enabling clinicians to access peer review outcomes and performance evaluations across the organization to be used in credentialing.

CASE STUDY



As a result of this enhanced interoperability, Regional Medical Center C improved the timeliness of its peer reviews, reducing the review cycle from months to weeks. The centralized system also ensured compliance with legal requirements for data sharing and documentation. Clear and consistent peer review data contributed to improved clinician performance and accountability, ultimately enhancing the quality of patient care while mitigating legal risks associated with inadequate peer evaluations.

Regulatory and Compliance Considerations in Data Sharing



REGULATORY COMPLIANCE

Adherence to HIPAA Regulations:

Ensure compliance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) by protecting patient privacy and securing confidential health information during data sharing and interoperability processes.

Establishing Standardized Data Sharing Agreements:

Implement clear data-sharing agreements that outline the responsibilities and expectations of all parties involved, including confidentiality protections, data usage limits, and mechanisms for resolving disputes.

Utilizing Secure Data Systems:

Invest in secure electronic health record (EHR) systems and interoperability platforms that include encryption and access controls, safeguarding credentialing, privileging, and peer review data against unauthorized access or breaches.

Regulatory and Compliance Considerations in Data Sharing



Implementing Training and Education Programs:

Regularly provide training for staff on legal and compliance requirements surrounding data sharing, including the importance of maintaining confidentiality and understanding the implications of data misuse or mismanagement.

Auditing and Monitoring Compliance:

Conduct regular audits and assessments of data-sharing practices to ensure compliance with regulatory requirements, identifying potential gaps or vulnerabilities and implementing corrective actions to enhance data protection.

Incorporating State-Specific Regulations:

Recognize and integrate state-specific laws and regulations governing data sharing, credentialing, and peer review, ensuring that all practices comply with local legal frameworks in addition to federal regulations.

Challenges to Achieving Interoperability & Data Sharing

CHALLENGE



Fragmented Data Systems:

Many healthcare organizations use disparate systems that do not easily communicate with each other, leading to difficulties in sharing credentialing, privileging, and peer review information effectively.

Data Privacy and Security Concerns:

The increased risk of data breaches and the potential for unauthorized access create hesitation among organizations when it comes to sharing sensitive information related to providers and patient care.

Resistance to Change:

Stakeholders may be reluctant to adopt new interoperability practices or technologies due to a lack of understanding, fear of job displacement, or dissatisfaction with existing workflows, hindering progress toward effective data sharing.

Challenges to Achieving Interoperability & Data Sharing

CHALLENGE



Regulatory Complexity:

Navigating a complex landscape of laws and regulations surrounding data sharing can be daunting for healthcare organizations, leading to uncertainty about compliance and legal liabilities.

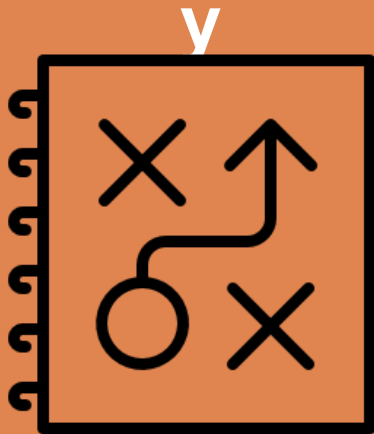
Limited Resources and Funding:

Many organizations face constraints in terms of resources, including budget limitations for technology investments or staffing shortages, which can impede the ability to implement and maintain effective data-sharing practices.

Insufficient Training and Education:

A lack of training and resources for staff on the importance of data sharing and the operational aspects of new systems can lead to mismanagement of data, reduced efficacy in credentialing and peer review processes, and higher risks of non-compliance.

Strategies for Integrating Interoperability



Develop Standardized Data Definitions:

Establish clear and consistent definitions for data elements related to credentialing, privileging, and peer review to ensure accurate and uniform data sharing across different systems and departments.

Implement Interoperable Technologies:

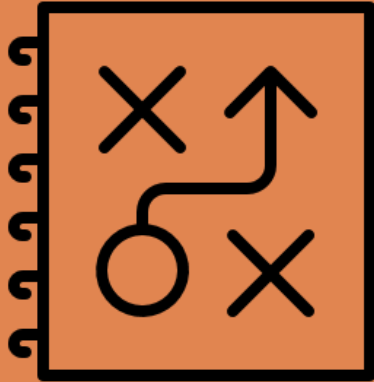
Invest in interoperable electronic health record (EHR) systems and credentialing software that can seamlessly connect with existing platforms, allowing for effective data exchange and access across various healthcare settings.

Foster Collaboration Among Stakeholders:

Engage stakeholders from various departments (e.g., clinical, administrative, IT) in the development and implementation of interoperability initiatives, ensuring that diverse perspectives and needs are represented to enhance collaborative efforts.

Strategies for Integrating Interoperability

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Conduct Regular Training and Education:

Provide ongoing training for Medical Staff Services Professionals and other relevant staff, focusing on the functionalities and benefits of interoperability, as well as how to use data-sharing tools effectively for credentialing and privileging processes.

Establish Clear Data Governance Policies:

Create robust data governance frameworks that outline procedures for data sharing, including privacy and security protocols, roles and responsibilities, and compliance with regulatory standards to ensure responsible data usage.

Monitor and Evaluate Interoperability Initiatives:

Regularly assess the effectiveness of interoperability integration efforts by establishing key performance indicators (KPIs) and conducting reviews that enable organizations to refine and improve credentialing and privileging workflows based on data-driven insights.

Engaging Medical Staff Services Professionals in Data Sharing



Addressing Concerns About Peer Protection:

Acknowledge the reluctance among some Medical Staff Services Professionals (MSPs) to share data due to fears that it may erode peer protection and confidentiality, leading to resistance in collaborative efforts.

Emphasizing the Value of Shared Data:

Highlight the importance of sharing valuable data related to quality and competency of healthcare providers, demonstrating how it contributes to improved patient outcomes and organizational success.

Promoting a Culture of Trust and Collaboration:

Foster an organizational culture that encourages open communication and collaboration among MSPs, reassuring them that shared data will be used responsibly and ethically to enhance performance rather than punitive measures.

Engaging Medical Staff Services Professionals in Data Sharing



Implementing Strong Confidentiality Measures:

Develop and communicate robust confidentiality protocols and data-sharing agreements that protect provider identities and sensitive information, reassuring MSPs that peer review processes remain protected.

Educating on Regulatory Safeguards:

Provide education on existing regulations (such as HIPAA and state laws) that protect peer review data and promote safe sharing practices, emphasizing that legal frameworks support, rather than hinder, effective data sharing.

Highlighting Success Stories:

Share case studies and success stories illustrating how effective data sharing can lead to improved quality of care, enhanced provider performance, and reduced errors, reinforcing the benefits of collaboration among MSPs.

Tools and Technologies to Enhance Interoperability



Integrated Electronic Health Records (EHR) Systems:

Utilize advanced EHR systems that support interoperability by allowing seamless data exchange between different healthcare entities, ensuring that credentialing, privileging, and peer review processes are based on up-to-date and accurate information.

Credentialing Management Software:

Implement robust credentialing management tools that offer features for automated verification, tracking credentialing statuses, and facilitating secure data sharing among stakeholders, enhancing efficiency and reducing duplication of efforts.

Data Exchange Standards and Protocols:

Adopt standardized data exchange frameworks such as HL7, FHIR, and DICOM to ensure that data shared among various systems is formatted consistently, allowing for smoother interoperability and improved communication among providers.

Collaboration Platforms:

Leverage secure collaboration platforms that enable real-time communication and document sharing among Medical Staff Services Professionals, credentialing committees, and other departments, facilitating coordinated efforts in managing credentialing and peer review processes.

Developing Standard Operating Procedures

Establish Clear Protocols for Data Sharing:

Create standardized operating procedures that outline specific steps for sharing data related to credentialing, privileging, and peer review, ensuring that all stakeholders understand their roles and responsibilities in the process.

Incorporate Confidentiality and Security Measures:

Integrate protocols that address data privacy and security, including guidelines for maintaining confidentiality during data sharing, to protect sensitive information while facilitating effective collaboration.

Regularly Review and Update SOPs:

Implement a schedule for periodic reviews and updates of the SOPs to reflect changes in regulations, advancements in technology, and feedback from users, ensuring that the procedures remain relevant and effective in promoting interoperability and compliance.



Preparing for Future Trends



Embracing Emerging Technologies:

Stay informed about advancements in technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and blockchain, which have the potential to enhance data sharing and interoperability by improving accuracy, security, and efficiency in credentialing and peer review processes.

Building Adaptive Frameworks:

Develop frameworks that allow for flexibility and adaptability in credentialing and privileging processes, enabling healthcare organizations to quickly respond to evolving healthcare demands and regulatory changes.

Strengthening Data Governance:

Establish strong data governance protocols that define data ownership, accountability, and compliance requirements, ensuring that as interoperability evolves, organizations maintain control over data integrity and security.

Promoting Continuous Education and Training:

Invest in ongoing education and training programs for Medical Staff Services Professionals and stakeholders to keep them updated on best practices in interoperability, emerging trends, and regulatory requirements, ensuring readiness for future challenges.

- Interoperability is critical for enhancing data sharing in credentialing, privileging, and peer review.
- Strong data sharing practices improve patient care and operational efficiency in healthcare settings.
- Addressing concerns about peer protection is essential for promoting a culture of collaboration among Medical Staff Services Professionals.
- Robust confidentiality and data governance policies are necessary to safeguard sensitive information during data sharing.
- Investing in advanced technologies, such as interoperable EHR systems and credentialing management tools, streamlines workflows.
- Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) must be developed and regularly updated to reflect best practices in data sharing.
- Continuous education and training for staff are essential to ensure compliance with regulations and the effective use of interoperability tools.
- Monitoring and evaluating data-sharing initiatives help organizations refine processes and improve overall quality and competency in healthcare delivery.



Questions?



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