Pharmacy Automation and Technology

Keeping Up with Advancements in Health Information Technology

Brent I. Fox, PharmD, PhD,* and Bill G. Felkey, MS †

We all face an onslaught of information on a daily basis in our personal and professional lives. We view it as a significant part of our professional responsibility to help our colleagues stay abreast of the latest advancements related to health information technology (HIT). This month we explore some of the key resources that we find helpful for keeping up-to-date with emerging and disruptive technology.

Outreach is an important component of the life of a faculty member. Our outreach and engagement efforts allow us to connect with professional colleagues from local hospitals and health systems and in international settings. Outreach includes presentations at meetings, consultations for groups of all sizes, and regular columns in journals, such as the one you are reading. Regular readers of this column know that we consistently focus on the role of health information technology (HIT) in pharmacy and in health care. In general, the goal of our outreach is to keep our readers up-to-date on the latest HIT advancements, research, and discoveries that we believe have the potential to impact patient care and pharmacy practice. Information and the technology that manages it are a common denominator in every discipline and specialty. But how do we (and maybe you) keep up with it?

We have many of the same resources for keeping informed as you do: professional meetings, colleagues, journals, webinars, vendors, and more. Sometimes, the information comes to us in a nice package, including all of the related information, so we can interpret it and the impact it may have on pharmacy. More often, however, the information comes to us in silos, requiring us to internalize it, consider it along with other information, and ultimately determine what it means to pharmacy or health systems or physician or nurses. A sizable chunk of the information about which we write comes to us through the Internet, as a

byproduct of transactions or innovation occurring in one manner or another.

One of our most useful Internet-based resources was www.ihealthbeat.org from the California Health Care Foundation. We use the past tense because the site (which was more of a service than a static page) stopped adding new content on February 1, 2016. The loss of this extremely valuable tool prompted us to reflect on the strategic level methods we find most useful for keeping up with HIT, which we explore below. Our focus is not necessarily on the functions or features of these methods (eg, a push-email service), but instead on the value and quality of the information provided.

We will begin with www.healthcareitnews.com, one of our favorite alternatives to www.ihealthbeat.org. [iHealthBeat](http://www.ihealthbeat.org) did not include advertisements on its site, whereas [Healthcare IT News](http://www.healthcareitnews.com) does. We do not necessarily view this as a significant negative; ads have become so pervasive on the Internet that seasoned users are able to unconsciously ignore them to focus on relevant information. Arrangement of information by topical areas is similar across both sites, focusing on technology, policy, and industry news. Other sites that we recommend include www.healthit.gov, the primary governmental site for all information related to HIT, and www.modernhealthcare.com, whose scope is broader than HIT. Of note, [Healthcare IT News](http://www.healthcareitnews.com) is part of a larger publishing group affiliated with HIMSS (Healthcare Information and Management System Society), an international organization

*Associate Professor, Department of Health Outcomes Research and Policy, Harrison School of Pharmacy, Auburn University, Auburn, Alabama; †Professor Emeritus, Auburn University, Auburn, Alabama

focused on optimal use of HIT. In many instances, ads can be unrelated and distracting, but when they are complementary they bring a concrete application to bounce off of a focus area.

There are several core professional meetings whose sole focus is HIT. While not focused exclusively on pharmacy, the HIMSS annual meeting is arguably the largest, single conference in the United States on HIT. If you like technology as much as we do, the HIMSS exhibit floor is an extremely large playground, with about 15,000 more attendees than the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists' (ASHP) Midyear Clinical Meeting. Speaking of ASHP's Midyear, we certainly include this conference in our list of key sources of HIT information. Although not as large as HIMSS, Midyear's exclusive focus on the needs of pharmacy make it an invaluable source of information for our specific, professional perspective.

While the mega-conferences with attendance numbering in the tens of thousands are great for experiencing a great breadth of information, we also find value in smaller conferences. ASHP's Summer Meeting includes several conferences, one of which is called the "Informatics Institute." The educational programming is targeted toward attendees' needs to advance their use of HIT. Like the Midyear, exhibits and networking sessions allow you to connect with colleagues.

We also rely on print media. Journals are an important source of information because they provide

a view from the research perspective, showing the why and how of HIT use. As a reader of *Hospital Pharmacy*, you are aware of the value found in this media. One of our primary journals is the *Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association (JAMIA)*, which covers the full spectrum of HIT topics. Content is not specific to pharmacy, but *JAMIA's* systemwide focus is very helpful in terms of providing a big-picture perspective.

We are tuned into the dynamic nature of our health care environment, especially the growing focus on engaging patients in their own care. One of our primary sources of information related to the use of HIT and the Internet to connect with patients and to enable their role in their own care is the *Journal of Medical Internet Research (JMIR)*. Because *JAMIA's* focus is on health care in the Internet age, there is considerably variety in article topics. The *JMIR* publishing group includes other journals with narrowed scope (eg, mHealth, medical informatics, human factors, etc).

This is a brief description of some of the resources we find of most value in helping us keep up with HIT. We encourage you to explore these resources for your own needs. We know that we probably missed some alternative resources that you find most valuable. Please send us an email to let us know what we should check out (Brent at foxbren@auburn.edu and Bill at felkebg@auburn.edu). ■