When asked recently to write an article regarding the impact of healthcare reform to oncology, I have to admit, I was hesitant to tackle this challenge. Many industry experts are in a mode of speculation about what it is, what it will eventually be and when, and, ultimately, how it will impact our specialized industry of oncology care. It is a little bit like describing the 2006 Atlanta Olympic mascot who was appropriately named “WhatIzIt” and later condensed to “Izzy.” Those of us tried and true Atlantans are still living that debacle down as much as the opening ceremony with 4-wheel trucks introducing the world to the South. But, I digress…

The bottom line on healthcare reform for oncology is that there are mostly gray areas we are navigating through as colleagues and will continue to wade through for at least the next couple of years. The key to this puzzle is ACTION and preparation for what MAY lie ahead! As cancer executives across the country know, just a few of the struggles you face every day include accepting more non-paying clinic patients from private oncology practices; managing ever declining budgets; prioritizing technological advances to meet budget restrictions; expanding aging facilities to accommodate new technologies and patient growth; balancing a range of patient demands and perceptions related to disease-specific, sub-specialized care and a range of supportive care programs; etc. Keeping these balls in the air on a day-to-day basis is quite demanding, especially while trying to understand what's coming next. In the following sections, I have attempted to provide a brief but focused update of some of the key considerations when positioning your cancer program in the early era of reform.

What is Certain?

A. The Patients are Coming. Not only will the cancer boom be felt with the growing population and incidence of cancer nationwide, but the platform for healthcare reform will “push” a patient population to oncology providers through expanded, universal health coverage as well as through the provision of ensuring coverage for patients with pre-existing conditions. Very simply put, oncology executives and providers alike must plan for expansion of physicians and midlevel providers, personnel, facilities, technologies and resources to care for the growing populations of cancer patients. And, not only are patients coming, but they will be coming in the context of lower reimbursement per patient scenarios driven by quality outcomes measures, prompting alternate care delivery models in the future.

B. Care Coordination and Guidelines are King. Although many programs are trending towards multidisciplinary care coordination, treatment and survivorship models based on accepted national oncology clinical guidelines and measures, the large majority of oncology providers, both private practices and hospitals alike, are clearly not close to achieving this care delivery model. The foundation of health reform will require all oncology providers to:

- improve care coordination;

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The Oncology Business Institute is a landmark collaboration of the Oncology Management Consulting Group of Pennsylvania and Oncology Metrics of Texas. TOBI brings together OMC Group’s decades of national experience in developing, running and advising successful hospital cancer centers and Oncology Metrics’ unparalleled expertise in data collection and benchmark analysis.

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TOBI is a membership organization dedicated to providing administrators of hospital outpatient cancer centers with the information they need to ensure maximum performance through comparative benchmarking, networking, and education.

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Healthcare Reform and Its Impact to Oncology  
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- establish and expand multidisciplinary care teams;
- assume provider accountability;
- increase use of EMR/information management; and,
- expand access to survivorship/long-term care planning.

For the majority of our community oncology providers, achieving this list of healthcare reform requirements will be overwhelming simply because of the highly independent nature of its local surgical, medical and radiation oncology environment. Further, most providers are unofficially following national guidelines but are not proactively collecting data, measuring and/or reporting adherence to guidelines and evidence-based medicine internally or externally. Executives must proactively develop strategies to align their oncology care providers who are essential to maximizing their program’s long-term viability.

C. Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs) are Inevitable. The latest buzz word is “ACO” but, regardless of what the end product of health reform is called, it all means driving providers together to provide evidence-based medicine while reducing redundancy, controlling costs, managing episodes of care collaboratively, and being reimbursed singly. Do the words “bundling and value-based purchasing” ring a bell? It will be up to the providers to determine the best and most appropriate way to collaboratively negotiate payer rates and distribute shared reimbursement fairly among the varying providers. So, again, the “Kumbayah” moment arrives clothed as healthcare reform.

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While there are other areas of reform that will certainly have some impact on oncology, in my opinion, there is less of an impact than the core considerations outlined previously concerning capacity for patient growth, alignment of providers, adherence to evidence-based medicine, and shared risk/reward for payment of services. It is clear that healthcare reform’s more far-reaching impact will not be implemented until 2014, which provides oncology executives lead time to focus on the core areas outlined within this update. Tackling each of these concurrently will certainly be two to three years in the making and, at that time, we all should have a better view into the crystal ball.

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President’s Message
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Electronic medical records and clinical management systems can be daunting. This leads into our current issue of ACE Update and the article on “Keys to Successful Implementation of a Clinical Management System”. This article will help many of us as we implement new software and need to ensure that we identify and plan for the barriers to successful implementation.

Kelley Simpson’s article on Healthcare Reform and its Impact to Oncology begins the debate regarding what the future will bring and how we as executives need to prepare. We may not have a crystal ball but we know that with every new change in legislation there are challenges with ensuring implementation and adherence. This is only the beginning; as 2014 nears much more will be said on this issue.

The Board of Directors and Committees are energetic and working hard to keep ACE vibrant and provide benefits for our members. I would like to personally thank everyone who is working on ACE committees for their hard work and dedication. This newsletter is an example of the work of the Newsletter/Publication Committee. As part of ACE’s mission to provide leadership development through continuing education, the Member Services Committee is working on their third Hot Topic web conference call on Survivorship, look for email notifications this summer. Hope you didn’t miss the other two Hot Topics on “Discussion of ASCO’s Cost of Cancer Care Guidance Statement” and “Patient Navigation”.

The Education Committee is very busy planning the 17th Annual Meeting and educational conference 2011 in New Orleans, please mark your calendar for January 26th through January 29th 2011 and plan to join us. The Membership Committee asked me to remind you to spread the word about ACE to your colleagues and encourage them to join ACE this July so they get the benefit of a full year and enjoy all our membership benefits. We also ask that you pay your own dues in a timely manner as they are due now.

Remember, if you have other ideas you would like to challenge us with, please feel free to contact us. ACE is made better by the contributions of its members!

Happy Summer to all of you!
Deciding to move forward with the purchase and implementation of a new Clinical Research Management (CRM) system is often a very exciting but trying process. The system will bring many positive changes to the organization but everybody involved is already very busy with their day-to-day activities. Additionally, there are many decisions to be made with regard to the implementation of the new system. So, what can the organization do to ensure an efficient and successful implementation?

Successful CRM implementation projects have some key factors in common. These include a clear vision, engaged leadership, a dedicated team, and consistent and honest communication. Additionally, the organization must take ownership of the processes that will leverage the newly available capabilities associated with the new system. And finally, the development of a project rollout plan that includes a reasonable scope of work and timeline, and can be successfully supported and implemented by the organization, rounds out the keys to a successful CRM implementation.

A Clear Vision
The vision for the introduction of a new CRM system needs to be developed and clearly articulated for the team by the leadership. Leadership must articulate what the new system means to the organization and what steps should be taken in order to realize the vision. Translating this high-level vision into action is what the implementation project is all about. Clear goals and objectives that fully characterize the vision provide the roadmap for implementation.

Engaged Leadership
Executive leadership’s ongoing involvement is critical to the success of any enterprise software implementation project. Often, organizational leadership sets the vision for the project and is engaged at the start of the project, but continued engagement throughout the project is equally important. Ongoing involvement by leadership serves to avoid surprises stemming from decisions made along the way. Additionally,
**Keys to Successful Implementation of a CRM System**

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Involving key end users as the team works through the details is also beneficial. The organizational leadership has a responsibility to remove any barriers to success. If staffing changes or workload shifts are required, these leaders will be called upon to support and execute these changes.

**A Dedicated Project Team**
The makeup of the core project team is at the heart of what makes a project successful. Each member of the team will play an important role in the outcome. This team will take ownership of a multitude of actions required to drive the project to completion as well as the long term use of the system.

At the center of this team is a dedicated Project Manager. The Project Manager is responsible for organizing resources and ensuring that the vision, goals and objectives remain in focus throughout the project. The most successful project managers are acutely aware of the business needs of the organization and are actively involved in completing tasks necessary to achieve the project objectives.

Business Process Owners and Subject Matter Experts are equally important to the project. These groups typically include front line managers and the people who will be using the system after the successful rollout. Clearing a dedicated portion of weekly schedules for the business team is challenging but necessary because of the long-term implications for this group. After all, this group has the most to gain, or lose, as a result of the decisions made during implementation.

To round out the project team, Information Systems staff with appropriate skill sets will be required to assist with the project. Depending upon the organization and scope of the project, these roles will vary.

The final members of the core team are the software vendor team members. The software vendor will assign team members that mirror organizational team members in many ways such as a dedicated Project Manager, Business Analyst, and technical support resources.

**Consistent and Honest Communication**
Timely communication of project activities is required on many different fronts. Within the project team, building trusting relationships through open and honest communication will pull the team through the critical phases of the project. The vision, goals and objectives of the project should be communicated at all levels of the organization. As the project progresses, it is important to provide high-level updates to all stakeholders in order to build momentum for the rollout and calibrate expectations for the solution. The end users should be kept abreast of the progress being made in the project so that they are fully ready to adopt the new system.

**Defining Processes**
It is important to remember that the software is a tool designed to be a means to an end. Often, new operational processes will need to be developed with scope beyond the use of the new software system. The people responsible for developing processes that are in line with the needs of the organization, are key to the project’s success.

Developing new processes, or making significant changes to existing ones, can seem overwhelming at the beginning of a project, especially when workload is being shifted from one workgroup to another. Taking an iterative approach, beginning with an outline of the process and then fleshing out the details, helps the team manage this task. Involving key end users as the team works through the details is also beneficial. Incorporating their feedback demonstrates that the needs of end users are being considered. Then, these users will also provide positive feedback to the rest of the team, ultimately facilitating the adoption of the system.

**Developing the Rollout Plan**
The rollout plan sets the stage for success. When determining the scope of the rollout for implementation, multiple options must be considered.

The experience of the software vendor should be leveraged to understand the various options along with their respective pros and cons. The vendor can help the project team understand the demands on resources that will be required for various activities and can help set reasonable expectations regarding the effort required to accomplish tasks.

Taking a staged approach to the rollout works well for many organizations. The new CRM system provides an opportunity for the organization to distribute work across different teams during the course of the implementation. After giving time for stabilization following one stage, task and staffing adjustments can be made in support of subsequent stages. Breaking a project into several small wins leads to early successes and builds momentum for the remainder of the rollout.

Organizations that set reasonable expectations, have supportive and engaged leadership and focused communication channels have enjoyed great successes with their CRM implementation projects. By keeping the goals and objectives visible, the vision can be executed successfully.
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