

Project Abstract

Research on the costs and quality of medical care and how best to organize and finance medical care is known as “health services research.” Emory already has a number of strengths in this area, such as the Department of Health Policy and Management in the Rollins School of Public Health, but Emory could do more to foster an environment conducive to health services research in the medical and nursing schools. Because of declining reimbursement levels and payment schemes that shift risk from payers to providers, health systems like Emory will need to operate more efficiently and demonstrate performance on quality measures. Health services research will help clinicians and leadership evaluate how changes in organizational structure, staffing, and care patterns affect costs and quality. Improved health services research capabilities will also enhance the ability of Emory faculty to compete for grant funds from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, the National Institutes of Health, and the newly formed Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute. There are many steps Emory could take to improve health services research capabilities, but we believe that an important first step is to increase researchers’ ability to access data from Emory’s electronic medical records systems. Many researchers with whom we spoke want to evaluate changes in organization and care patterns at Emory, but believe that the process for obtaining data is opaque, cumbersome, and too costly. Emory information technology staff are aware of these issues and are taking steps to publicize the availability of data, but more could be done. We recommend that Emory:

- Develop an expedited human subjects review process to facilitate access to de-identified data.
- Develop “limited data sets” that researchers can access at minimal expense.
- Maximize the value of data by ensuring complete and consistent capture of data across the Emory Healthcare system (e.g. standardized data fields).
- Involve end-users, junior and mid-career investigators and clinicians in the planning process.
- Encourage researchers in the SON and EHC Nursing Facilitate access to data among non-technical users.

Many companies generate data as part of their routine business operations. Like sawdust from a mill, data can be ignored and discarded or repurposed and repackaged into something useful. Increasingly, companies are realizing that the data they generate are a valuable resource. They can use it to reduce costs and improve customer retention. In healthcare, the shift from paper to electronic medical records has created new data and opportunities for research and evaluation to find out “what works” in health care. The challenge for the custodians of these data is to develop procedures, resources, and organizational structures to take advantage of them.

The Affordable Care Actors

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