

TALES OF TRANSFORMATION



Interoperability in health care

ToT S5E3 Transcript

Heidi: [00:00:00] The future of health will revolve around the exchange of information between consumers, physicians, life sciences, and health care organizations and new entrants. But what will it take for the health care industry to get to a point where all data is integrated and easily accessible?

This is Tales of Transformation.

At a recent conference I sat down with Dave Biel to discuss the importance of interoperability and health care—what organizations are already doing to improve connectivity and some of the biggest challenges that could get in the way of the industry achieving radical interoperability.

Welcome to the show, Dave.

Dave: [00:00:36] Hello.

Heidi: [00:00:36] Let's get started. Where are health care organizations focusing their investments to lay the foundation for interoperability?

Dave: [00:00:44] The way I would describe it is, we have a lot of building blocks that have been laid down, if you will. There is a pretty massive investment going on in the health care industry across multiple different organizations. We just recently completed a survey across numerous life sciences and health care and even disruptive organizations, and really asked the question—How are you making investments around interoperability?—to try to get at that. And what we found was that there is a significant investment, so nearly 80 percent of these organizations that we surveyed have hired data architects to define their interoperability strategy. Seventy-three percent have a dedicated and centralized team that oversees interoperability in some way, shape, or form. Fifty-seven percent have established an architecture strategy and an interoperability strategy across their business functions. Basically, what we're seeing is that the building blocks around what we call interoperability and the need to share data is something that everyone knows needs to happen, and the investments are starting to be made.

Heidi: [00:01:55] Organizations, as you have just shared, are making significant investments. So what are some of the biggest barriers to interoperability that health care companies are currently facing?

Dave: [00:02:05] We just talked about some of the statistics around what's going on today. Over the past 10 to 15 years, we had a massive investment that was partially funded by the government and by the private sector as well. High tech and meaningful use has really put a good foundation of data across our health care network in the US, and honestly, there's a pretty good global network.

However, we still have a significant number of barriers to achieve something that's more radically interoperable. So, there's a lack of standards out there, and while we're starting to see some default standards take shape, we don't really have regulated standards. There's no normal vocabulary or nomenclature really, or standard nomenclature for even standard terms today. Data ownership is probably one of the biggest issues. So who owns my health data? Do I own it? Does my doctor own it? Does my hospital own it? Does my insurance company own it? Does my pharmacy own it? ▶

They all seem to own it and they all want to own it. And then, one of the biggest issues that everyone is talking about is security: data security, privacy, etcetera. And while I think everyone is concerned about security, when we did the polling in the survey there were a number of executives who said that's the No. 1 issue, but a number of them actually said that they would be able to surmount that challenge with technology and standards and regulations, which I think we see happening in the European Union and other places, and we're fairly sure are going to come here, but the standardization of all the things around data and information—whether it's standard interfaces, standard APIs, standard ownership principles, regulations—the standards are just not there, and that's probably where I think we have the biggest hill to climb. And then the last thing I would say is, I also think that there's an understanding now by most health care organizations, that in the new world of health care, data is power. And so while there's a need to share it, in order to drive insights, and share it across organizations, there's also a desire to hoard it. And I think that that's a tension that's playing out in the industry.

Heidi: [00:04:28] How are you seeing health care organizations collaborate to improve data and connectivity?

Dave: [00:04:33] So, when I look at collaboration and health care, what I think I see more, and what we see more, is collaboration around big industry problems. So population health and chronic diseases and opioid addiction—just the triple aim in and of itself: cost, quality, and access—are big issues that I think most organizations have realized cannot be solved alone. So what we're seeing is a lot of collaboration around those problems, and I think as these different organizations start to come together and “think tank” their solutions, what they find is that there is no solution without data, and you have some of the data and I have some of the data. And by the way, there are five other entities who have other data that if we bring all of that together, we actually can drive insight, and if we put some artificial intelligence and cognitive tools on top of that, I can actually predict what's going to, you know, how things are going to play out from a health and wellness perspective.

Heidi: [00:05:39] So shifting a little bit, Dave, give us an overview of how companies outside of the health care industry are driving interoperability.

Dave: [00:05:47] Yeah, I think it's a good question. There's a lot of that happening through what we call the disruptive organizations, the orthogonal organizations to health care who are getting in. They're not focused on interoperability, they're focused on trying to solve the problem that the rest of the world or the rest of the US health care system has not solved after 20, 30, 40, keep counting, years. We've been talking about the same problems for that long and haven't solved them, and I think we finally are sitting with quite an unsustainable model. So, we see the Apples, the Googles, the Amazons, the Microsofts, and the retail organizations—the CVS's, the Walmarts, Walgreens, etcetera—really aggressively moving into health care, and I think what they're promising is a different solution to these problems, and that different solution leverages a next-gen set of capabilities that starts with a digital footprint, a digital front door, a digital meet-the-consumer—where they are, when they are, as they are. And to do that, you actually need to use digital technologies in a much more aggressive way, and to use digital technologies you need data. And you need all kinds of data. So we're seeing Amazon, especially with Haven and now the Amazon Care announcement recently. We see Walmart with their health hub that they piloted recently in Texas, and CVS with their set of pilots; those all will have digital backbones. They may not in their initial instantiations, although the Amazon Care One definitely will. I think these organizations more than anybody else are going to drive interoperability standards at a much more rapid pace. I think that they're setting the pace, and the traditional organizations know they need to either keep up or be disrupted out.



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Heidi: [00:07:43] What you're suggesting is that these outsiders are setting the pace, and if that's the case, so what will it take for health care stakeholders to more broadly achieve interoperability?

Dave: [00:07:54] At the end of the day, while the disruptors are going to be there, they are on the outside looking in, trying to understand one of the most complex industries, probably in the world. And so the organizations who are enrooted in the system today are going to need to play a role in some way, shape, or form. I think what they can do to try to stay in front is to invest meaningfully as they can in data, analytics, insights, artificial intelligence, and cognitive tools that layer on top of those, use the regulatory environment that's coming. Use your big issues that you're trying to solve, to try to attach some additional interoperability standardization and build up your capability so that you're not left behind.

Heidi: [00:08:46] It's an interesting point, and I do think there is a place for legacy systems, particularly as it relates to the need for standardization. You know, this idea that the patient continues to trust the legacy system, and there's something to be said for that. We can trust systems to deliver our packages, I'm not sure for health care, but we'll see.

Dave: [00:09:05] We're going to find out.

Heidi: [00:09:06] We'll find out. Even organizations leading the industry in interoperability are aware that many disruptors have entered the health care market, and could potentially push interoperability to the tipping point. Organizations that aren't yet thinking about interoperability strategically may find themselves lagging not only in data exchange, but in other key strategic areas such as value-based care. I want to thank Dave Beal for joining me today on Tales of Transformation.

Dave: [00:09:33] Thank you.

Heidi: [00:09:34] Thanks for listening, and stay tuned for our next episode where we'll explore interoperability in the life sciences industry.

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