Technology Jobs for Physician Leaders

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The Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) Act, enacted as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, is designed to promote the adoption and meaningful use of health information technology. Discussions around HITECH and meaningful use have generated a growing interest in non-clinical careers in the health information technology industry.

Health IT jobs are opening up all over the country for positions ranging from medical director of informatics to chief medical information officer (CMIO). These positions are available within the public and private sectors as hospitals and corporations seek talented physician executives to join their staffs.

Hospitals are recognizing their need to meet meaningful use requirements and they are seeking talented physicians who understand the health IT needs of hospital-based clinicians. Companies like McKesson, Allscripts, Cerner, Siemens, Epic, HP, Dell, Microsoft, and Verizon are hiring physicians to help them develop, improve, and sell health IT solutions that can improve health care delivery.

Language of health IT

Because of the HITECH Act, there is a growing number of career opportunities for physicians who have a strong understanding of health information technology and the evolving world of medical informatics.

You don't need to have a formal degree in medical or health care informatics to find a job in the IT industry. However, you need to understand the language of health IT, because this industry is full of strange acronyms and terminology that may be foreign to you. Here are several examples of common health IT acronyms:

- **CDS** = Clinical Decision Support
- **CPOE** = Computerized Physician Order Entry
- **HIE** = Health Information Exchange
- **PHR** = Personal Health Record
- **PHI** = Personal Health Information
- **RHIO** = Regional Health Information Organization
- **CCHIT** = Certification Commission for Health Information Technology
- **ONCHIT** or **ONC** = Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT
- **HITRC** = Health Information Technology Research Center
- **ONC-ATCB** = Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT Authorized Testing and Certification Bodies

Here are some technical acronyms that often come up in the health IT industry:

- **API** = Application Programming Interface
- **ASP** = Application Service Provider
- **SaaS** = Software as a Service

It is also important for physicians to gain familiarity with information technology terms like interoperability, data exchanges, client-based solutions, ASP models, and more. Physicians need to know how to communicate with the IT staff so they can describe their evolving needs and collaborate to build effective systems.

Getting started

If you're interested in pursuing a career in health IT, how should you get started? Here are a few suggestions:

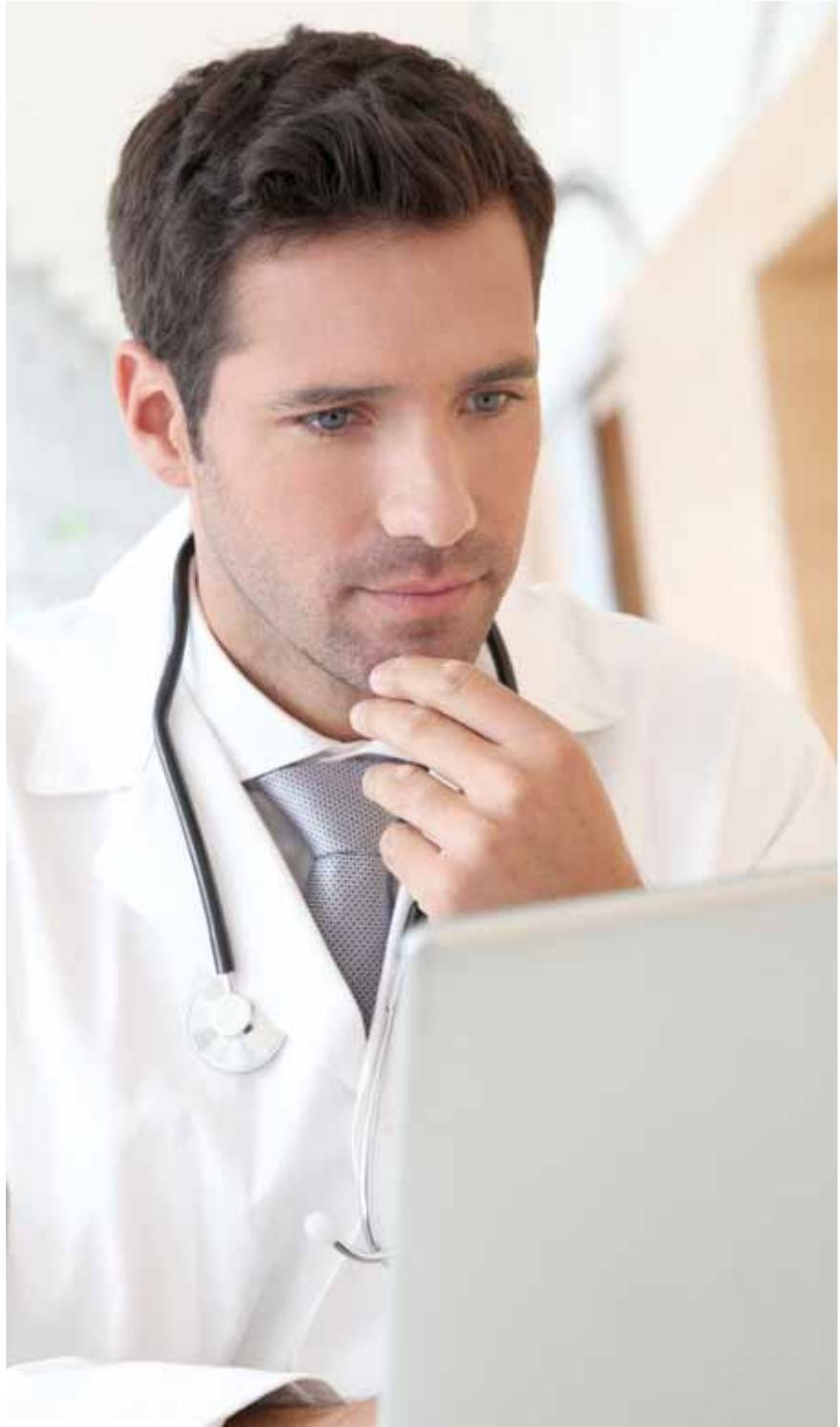## 1. Get involved with national health IT organizations.

There are a number of health IT organizations that provide educational resources and networking opportunities for physicians who are interested in health IT. Each of these organizations holds national conferences and several of them also have local and regional chapters. Here are several examples of major health IT organizations:

- **AHIMA** = American Health Information Management Association

- **AMIA** = American Medical Informatics Association

- **AMDIS** = Association of Medical Directors of Information Systems

- **HIMSS** = Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society

This year, the HIMSS annual meeting had over 30,000 attendees and the American College of Physician Executives teamed up for the first time to get more physician executives to attend HIMSS. All ACPE members were offered complimentary registration for the convention so they could participate in HIMSS' first-ever physician executive forum. About 100 ACPE members took advantage of the offer.

The conference was full of energy and attendees were clearly excited about the growing opportunities to improve health care delivery through the use of information technology. There are other national conferences that are more focused around specific issues like mobile health, telemedicine, participatory medicine, and social media. Here are a few examples:

- Health 2.0

- ATA (American Telemedicine Association)

The HITECH Act continues to provide momentum in this field as hospitals and group practices adopt health IT solutions within their organizations. Many health organizations are still operating without clear guidance on the most effective ways to utilize health IT.

- mHealth Summit
- Connected Health Symposium by the Center for Connected Health
- iHT2 Health IT Summit by the Institute for Health Technology Transformation

The time to jump into health IT is now.

By attending major conferences, you will have the opportunity to meet other physicians who are currently working in health IT. You'll also get the chance to walk through the exhibit halls and speak directly with companies and organizations that may be interested in employing you.

2. Volunteer in health IT committees and task forces.

Make time to get involved by volunteering with a health IT committee in your local hospital or medical center. If you spend a significant amount of time in a hospital, get involved in different committees that are looking at ways to leverage health IT resources to improve patient care. Some groups may be focused on finding ways to improve care quality or patient satisfaction. There may be opportunities to identify gaps in care and opportunities for clinical workflow improvement.

Other hospital committees may be trying to identify ways to reduce medical errors by using CPOE and CDS in the ICU. As an experienced physician, you have the opportunity to volunteer in these committees and to interact with nurses, pharmacists, and other members of the care team to develop strategies, protocols, and policies that may improve workflow

efficiencies, patient care, and clinical outcomes.

Getting involved with hospital committees may also provide you with greater knowledge about health IT implementation challenges and opportunities within the inpatient setting. Companies that sell EHR solutions are often looking for physicians who have experience and insight around improving EHR clinical workflow and overcoming common implementation challenges.

If you mainly work in an outpatient setting, you can still find opportunities to volunteer in health IT committees by exploring these opportunities at local hospitals. Or, you may create a workgroup within your group practice to identify ways to improve efficiencies or to enhance your existing EHR systems.

Perhaps you can lead a committee involved in identifying the best EHR for your office-based practice as you prepare to transition from paper records to EHRs. By collaborating with surrounding hospitals or group practices, you may identify best practices surrounding health IT selection and adoption.

3. Try writing and publishing.

Another way to transition into the health IT industry is to establish yourself as a subject matter expert by publishing articles related to the use of health IT to improve clinical outcomes or workflow efficiencies. You can submit articles to the *Journal of Health Informatics* or the *Journal of Healthcare Information Management*.

Collaborate with nurses and pharmacists so that you can also describe the importance of interdepartmental collaboration as clinicians adopt health IT. You can also create a blog or submit an article to an established blog by writing about health IT security, patient privacy, or clinical workflow challenges.

If you demonstrate your working knowledge of current health IT issues, potential employers may find you and approach you to seek your expertise.

4. Look into mobile health (mHealth), teleHealth and electronic health (eHealth).

Health IT isn't only about hospitals and group practices. Organizations are looking at ways to leverage mobile technology such as smartphones and slate tablets like the iPad in the health care setting. We are in the midst of a mobile health or mHealth revolution, and there are a number of organizations investing resources to grow their mHealth capabilities.

As communication technology advances, the world of telehealth is converging with mHealth. There are still many rural sites that rely on video conferencing and other communication technologies to provide care remotely. However, as mobile devices get equipped with cameras and video capabilities, the future of telehealth may largely reside in the mHealth domain.

Today, mHealth is gaining tremendous momentum in developing countries because the mobile infrastructure provides an affordable way for health care delivery. If you have a strong interest in public health and international medicine, the mHealth industry could be a good fit for you.

The world of eHealth continues to evolve as patients become empowered by finding resources on the Internet. A number of organizations may be looking for medical directors to provide clinical oversight as they develop electronic health solutions through their websites.

Many of these companies focus on providing PHR services, so it is important to become fully knowledgeable about the latest HIPAA guidelines and regulations that relate

to personal health information and digital communication technologies.

5. Investigate online learning and social networking

There are a growing number of opportunities to use the Internet to learn and to network with other professionals working in the health IT industry. ACPE offers networking resources on its website and it has an active LinkedIn group where you will find physicians discussing health IT issues. There are other LinkedIn groups such as HIMSS, AMIA, and AMDIS where you can join discussions and contribute your insights surrounding health IT.

By becoming more visible within these online communities, you may get recognized by a potential employer who may eventually approach you about a possible job opportunity.

Other opportunities

Here are some other places where you may find career opportunities related to health IT:

- State medical societies: Your local state medical society may have a group dedicated to providing resources around health IT. Some organizations have developed a separate consulting organization to provide health IT support and guidance for local physicians and hospitals.

- Professional specialty societies or associations: Perhaps you belong to the AAFP, ACP, or other specialty societies like AAP or ASCO. Are you plugged into the health IT workgroups or committees within your specialty societies?

- Consulting organizations: Many management consulting firms are expanding their capabilities to provide health IT services to hospitals and medical group practices. Consulting may require a consider-

able amount of work-related travel, but you may find it enjoyable to solve complex problems and help medical groups improve organizational efficiencies.

- Startup companies: These days, there are many new startup companies that are trying to ride the huge health IT wave that has been generated by the HITECH Act. You can find these startup companies by engaging local entrepreneurship clubs like the MIT Enterprise Forum or Entrepreneurs' Organization. You may also identify startup companies by visiting local business schools that hold startup competitions.

The time to jump into health IT is now. The HITECH Act continues to provide momentum in this field as hospitals and group practices adopt health IT solutions within their organizations. Many health organizations are still operating without clear guidance on the most effective ways to utilize health IT.

There is a lack of formal clinical practice guidelines on health IT implementation, improving clinical workflow processes, transitioning from paper records to EHRs. Make sure to stay current about ongoing health IT issues by reading blogs, journal articles and health IT news websites. Also, participate in health IT webinars so that you can learn what other institutions are doing to effectively leverage health IT solutions.

The health IT industry is rapidly expanding and there is still plenty of room for growth within many organizations. Prove your value as a physician leader so that you become an indispensable member of the care team.