

EHR Obstacles



The New York Times exposed an interesting issue that should be troubling the health IT industry. [The article](#), published May 26, explains how competition in the electronic health record (EHR) sphere may be fundamentally impeding successful integration of records, thus preventing improved patient care. Competition among businesses is a fundamental tenant of our capitalist society, and its track record is pretty good. Healthy competition almost always breeds a better product or result.

So what's the issue here? EHRs, by nature, are only useful if they are integrated between providers, insurers, hospitals and doctors, so any may access patients' information quickly and accurately. But as companies win business, they wall their system off to some of those stakeholders represented by competing businesses. It protects their business interests, but in the end may hurt patient care.

The Times article invited a lot of introspection. We are a business dedicated to improving public health through technological solutions. But the first part of that sentence – we are a business – must be true, if the latter half is to be accomplished. Put another way, how do we balance the solvency of our business while still holding improved public health as the ultimate goal, in the case of EHRs?

Thankfully, Congress is taking a close look at this paradox. The government has an enormous investment in the interoperability of health records – to the tune of \$29 billion – on top of its natural vested interest in public health. Two bills, one signed into law last month and another working its way through the U.S. House of Representatives, prevent the blocking of health records from one entity to another if that entity is receiving a federal bonus for its transition to EHRs (as many are). Karen DeSalvo, the national coordinator for health information technology, is also looking into the matter on behalf of the White House.

We're happy to have the government's attention on such a critical issue, and hope the fixes they have installed improve outcomes. In the meantime, those of us in the health IT industry need to make our own headway on working together, because in the end, improved public health is more important than any intercompany rivalry.

How do you think Congress' bill will affect the industry? How would you address this puzzle? Tweet your thoughts [@CNSICorp](#) to join the conversation.