



Electronic Health Records: Utilization of Established Data Transaction Standards and Data Sharing

Health information technology (HIT) has the potential to revolutionize the healthcare delivery system and dramatically improve patient care and practice efficiency. However, the inability of HIT systems to transfer information between multiple platforms hinders the flow of vital information and opens practitioners to the possibility of medical errors.

Oral and maxillofacial surgeons (OMSs) are the surgical specialists of the dental profession who diagnose, treat and manage the conditions, defects, injuries and esthetic aspects of the mouth, teeth, jaws and face. OMSs practice interchangeably in hospital, ambulatory and office settings, performing procedures that incorporate elements of both medicine and dentistry. OMSs also are the only dental providers who take trauma call in the nation's emergency facilities, necessitating the need for patient information to transfer between their private practices and hospital ERs. Due to their niche in the nation's healthcare system, OMSs rely on a wide range of tools during daily practice – including practice management, billing and imaging systems – all of which must communicate code sets for both medical and dental procedures.

Several accredited bodies (including the Accredited Standards Committee X12, Health Level Seven, Standards Committee on Dental Informatics, Workgroup for Electronic Data Interchange and Digital Imaging and Communications in Medicine) work to establish standards for data transactions. When these standards are adopted, data can easily transmit between practitioners, ensuring the integrity and security of information. Unfortunately, some vendors are slow to adopt these data sets or choose to block the free flow of data – particularly in dentistry.

The American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons (AAOMS) encourages vendors to fully integrate nationally recognized transaction standards into their systems to advance the interoperability of electronic health records and other HIT. AAOMS further encourages practitioners to consider HIT systems that utilize these transaction standards and provide interoperability. AAOMS urges all vendors – regardless of federal mandate – to allow the free sharing of patient information between systems to further patient care and provide for improved outcomes studies and overall enhancement of healthcare services in this country.

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