Helga RIPPEN  
Chief health information officer and vice president, Center for Health Information Technology, Rockville

Planning, design, implementation and management of health information networks at the leading edge – what are the key challenges?

Moving health care into the “health information technology world” is a strategy to decrease the costs of health care delivery across the world. Some argue that the ability to exchange health information provides much of the potential benefits. These benefits not only touch health care but public health and the economy (e.g., development of new medical interventions). As a result, many governments and localities are implementing health information networks. However, planning, designing, implementing and managing these health information networks are challenging endeavors.

To begin with, an early conundrum – the chicken or the egg – do you need the sources of the data (e.g., EHR implementation) before you create an HI exchange? Moving to a successful HI network requires many things such as, clarity in purpose, transparency, stakeholder involvement, trust, expertise, patience, funding, and long-term commitment. Understanding the challenges is a first step in the process.