

# Interoperability Is a C-suite Issue

Leaders need to steer the course, not leave it to their tech staff.

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A campaign for interoperable data exchange presents an opportunity for new directions in leadership, tying a seemingly techie topic to larger challenges in a value-based era. Some examples:

- **Connecting business benefits** to the need to move information around interoperably. In population health management, for instance, if provider participants are on different EHRs, the health system needs to be able to pull data from all of them, says Pamela Arlotto, president and CEO of Maestro Strategies in Atlanta. In day-to-day clinical care, health care pros have to be able to exchange results and get orders across facility boundaries. “It’s like we finally caught up with why we need to do this,” she says.
- **Using the interoperability plan to address emerging problems** particular to accountable care such as “leakage,” care of attributed patients that is rendered outside the accountable care organization. The norm in the industry for this is an alarming 50 percent, says John Norenberg, of Advocate Health Care, Downers Grove, Ill. Active participation in a Chicago-area health information exchange is Advocate’s answer to that problem, even though only 60 percent of the region’s hospitals are in it. But, he adds, “As we see bigger players sign risk-based contracts, they are also signing up for the HIE.”
- **Paying more attention in the C-suite to how software acquisition** fits into the plan for interoperability, says Advocate CIO Bruce Smith. Breakdowns and failure still can occur because department heads have too much authority to make decisions based on a handful of enticing features and not on how data flows to the main EHR, thereby creating extra stress and expense in integration efforts.
- **Taking part in industry efforts** to accelerate the progress of interoperability, involving both information technology vendors and standards development organizations. Health care business and clinical leaders have to provide the strategies and use cases for technology professionals, not wait for the technology to develop in ways that run counter to provider workflow and practice, Arlotto says.