



HOW - T O G U I D E

4 ways to improve interoperability and connect patient health stories during a crisis

H E A L T H C A R E

Healthcare data is abundant these days, with a growth rate of **878%** since 2016. This data avalanche has spotlighted challenges within the healthcare ecosystem to exchange data at the level needed to truly connect patient information in a meaningful way. Interoperability is **defined as**: “The ability of computer systems or software to exchange and make use of information.” There’s an even simpler way to describe it, and perhaps **Grahame Grieve**, the founder of HL7 FHIR says it best: “Interoperability is all about people and connecting their health stories across different specialties, visits and consults across multiple locations.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has created even more urgency around the need to meaningfully exchange data at scale. Many agree that added surveillance, tracking and tracing of patients and their information, is the best approach to controlling the spread of infection. Despite the urgency surrounding a need to keep data flowing, connecting the necessary data points to make insightful decisions remains a challenge for healthcare organizations.

Here are four ways to help your organization connect patient health stories during and after a crisis.

1. Use one platform to connect all systems

The growing need to keep information flowing between individuals, various systems, and different organizations makes the rapid, secure exchange of information even more critical during a pandemic. Think about the various forms of data and where it comes from—patient records, lab results, devices, wearables and monitors, and physician notes, just to name a few. Some of the entities that generate data are inside your organization, but many are not. The entire ecosystem needs access to that data, from providers to researchers, payers, and suppliers. Each of these stakeholders is involved in the creation, exchange, and use of health information or data at various points throughout the patient’s health journey. Having a platform to keep information flowing provides an infrastructure that uses technical standards, policies, and protocols to enable seamless and secure capture, discovery, exchange, and utilization of data.

2. Create room to scale for future needs

With so much healthcare data available, many organizations simply aren't prepared to exchange data rapidly or scale to meet additional and unpredicted needs. The need to flow information from one area or entity to another has exposed interfaces and data standards that were never configured to support pandemic surveillance, tracking, and tracing. Because many healthcare encounters that were formerly handled in a physician's office have shifted to remote care during the pandemic, healthcare facilities needed to introduce new integrations sometimes overnight to meet patient demands. All of this points to developing a system that is agile enough to scale for the growing numbers and types of connections that will allow your organization to move quickly and decisively forward.

3. Engage with the right partner

Anyone who works in healthcare fundamentally understands the unique nature of the industry. The differences may not be readily apparent to outsiders, but those who work in healthcare quickly learn the unique qualities when compared against other industries and businesses. For one, healthcare is highly **regulated**. Think of the agencies that healthcare organizations interact with, including Health and Human Services (HHS), the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), just to name a few. Then add additional regulations from the HITECH Act and subsequent 21st Century Cures Act, adding more layers of oversight. On top of federal agency requirements, professional associations such as county-based medical societies validate credentials, for example. These are but a few of the regulatory agencies that are part of healthcare's fabric, which makes it imperative to work with a partner that focuses on healthcare and demonstrates expertise regarding the industry's regulations and the detailed interoperability facets of those regulations.

System integration and data interoperability will be crucial as health systems come out of the current crisis under extreme financial stress, and to survive, they will have to form partnerships to help them seamlessly keep information flowing.

4. Get ready for accelerated consumerism

When it comes to how healthcare organizations have functioned in the past, today's consumers no longer want to settle for the status quo. Consumers want ready access to their data in a format that is understandable and easy to access, and the only way to make that happen easily is through integrations in the cloud. In addition, consumers are learning that not all in-person visits and procedures are necessary, especially now that the telehealth door has been flung open during the pandemic. Today's **consumer wants information instantly and economically**, so digital and remote care is becoming more of a reality. Your organization should prepare to handle additional requests from patients who want their personal information delivered to them quickly and easily. That means you'll need:

- A cloud option for your integration platform
- Scalability and power
- Ease of use
- FHIR APIs
- Connection to the entire healthcare ecosystem

Find out more about how your organization can keep information flowing by downloading this eBook: [Five steps to responding to a crisis](#).

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