



Health IT: 2012 Predictions for Georgia



By Tino Mantella, President & CEO of the Technology Association of Georgia

As the dust settles on the end of another year, we look forward to the innovations sure to come in 2012—especially in the world of health information technology. From an increase in the delivery and adoption of mobile apps for health care, to a rise in the use of electronic medical records, the New Year poses great opportunities and challenges for the industry. And, as the nation's capital for health IT, Georgia will be the launch pad for much of the innovation to come.

So let's take a look at some of trends that will shape the health IT industry in 2012.

Mobile Apps

More than four billion phones are in use around the globe; 1.08 billion of them are smartphones and 3.05 billion of them are SMS enabled (according to Microsoft Tag). The rapid advancements and wide-spread adoption of mobile technologies have made their way to the healthcare industry. At the mHealth Summit earlier this year, the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS) announced it is making a formal entry into the mobile health IT world and it simultaneously released the inaugural *mHIMSS Mobile Technology Survey*. The survey of 164 mostly hospital-based CIOs and IT managers analyzes the adoption of mobile and wireless technologies for healthcare. According to the survey, only 38% of healthcare organizations currently have a strategy or policy regarding the use of mobile devices. But another 51% said they were developing a policy and about 80% of survey respondents said that many clinicians were interested in mobile technology. 2012 is expected to be a year when mobile emerges as a key driver to many health IT strategies.

Electronic Medical Records

Regulatory pressure is building on the industry to meet the meaningful use deadlines established under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009—which mandated that electronic medical records (EMRs) should be implemented by 2014—more and more patient information will be tracked digitally. And this means the competition among health IT vendors will continue to heat up in the next year. A growing number of companies, including the Georgia-based McKesson Technology Solutions, Greenway Medical Technologies and SimplifyMD, are developing EMR and electronic health record (EHR) solutions and tackling some of the biggest challenges in the industry, including keeping patient information secure and optimizing payment processing. Total market revenue for electronic health records (EHRs) is expected to hit \$6.5 billion in 2012, which is more than a sixfold increase from the \$973.2 million posted in 2009, a study from Frost & Sullivan predicts.

Self-Service and Telehealth Technologies

The combination of rising healthcare costs and a push for better access to health and medical services in rural areas has sparked the creation of a multitude of technologies to tackle these challenges. 2011 saw a rash of new companies releasing sophisticated solutions that provide screenings and health information to patients outside of the doctor's office, including sophisticated health screening kiosks and this will continue in the New Year. Georgia-based startup SoloHealth, for example, is targeting a nationwide rollout in 2012 of its SoloHealth Station that offers health tests, including vision, blood pressure, weight, and body mass index screenings, as well as an overall health assessment and access to a database of local doctors. Cloud-based services will support the growth of self-service solutions, giving patients the ability to monitor their health outside of the doctor's office and access that information when they do go for a checkup. Telehealth solutions will also grow more sophisticated in 2012 as companies tackle the challenges of rural healthcare and provide people in remote areas better access to health information and a wider variety of physicians and specialists.

Employment Demands

In addition to new technology innovations, 2012 will also see an increase in demand for capable IT specialists. The nation is currently facing a 50,000 health IT worker shortfall, so more emphasis will be placed on short-term training and long-term development of health IT talent. Some of the top skills that will be needed by the health IT industry in 2012 include security and compliance, data management, BI and analytics, ICD-10/5020 expertise, applications know-how and social media skills. Here in Georgia, a number of schools and public-private partnerships are addressing this challenge. Georgia Tech and Gwinnett Tech recently announced a new Health Information Technology (HIT) certificate program that taps into a \$1.65 million federal grant to train the chronically unemployed and veterans to become health information technology workers. And the Technology Association of Georgia Education Collaborative (TAG-Ed) is partnering with area schools and programs including the Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA) to spark an interest among high school and middle school students to pursue careers in health IT.

As the health IT industry continues to mature in 2012, Georgia will be the center of much of this innovation. From the companies and innovative technologies, to the talent and network of supportive organizations, Georgia truly is the nation's capital for health IT. For more information on the state's health IT industry and other leading clusters, visit www.wheregeorgialeads.com