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Health data portals prove costly--but worth the trouble

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As *FierceHealthIT* readers know, building a portal that offers a unified view of clinical data is extremely challenging. Not only is it a monster systems integration project, but developers also need to build an interface that *really* works. After all, the whole point of pulling together this kind of data is to make life simpler for users. Even if you tie together back-end systems brilliantly, people will develop workarounds that avoid your costly portal if they find it difficult to use.

On top of everything else, portal development increasingly includes outreach to consumers--giving patients access to their medical history, labs, pharmacy data and more. This makes sense, given that patients are demanding such access, but it adds yet another layer of complexity to the problem.

Given these issues, you're generally talking about a pretty expensive project when all is said and done. For example, when Duke University built a Web portal [0] serving up clinical data and patient billing information for its 400,000 to 500,000 patients, execs invested about \$1 million, according to outside estimates.

Still, many healthcare leaders seem convinced that building portals is a critical step in improving their operations. "Our theory is that a lot of communication between doctors and patients can happen online, asynchronously," said Paul Levy, CEO of Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, which has built a feature-rich doctor-patient portal [0]. "This leaves doctors free to spend time on the telephone or in person for the things that are more urgent or require more personal attention."

And though the evidence is mostly anecdotal, many providers are finding that their portal development project was worth the big investment. For example, though Milwaukee Children's Hospital and Health System spent a substantial \$500,000 to aggregate data from its clinical applications [0], executives seem pleased with the payoff. One key benefit has been that having access to key data has saved its providers lots of time and energy (and what's sweeter than that for a hospital administrator?).

Are you ready to think through how your institution should approach offering a unified view of clinical data? If so, I encourage you to attend our upcoming webinar [1], "Simplifying Patient Data Access with a Unified View." The webinar, which takes place on Thursday July 31 at 2PM ET, will offer a lively and detailed overview of the topic from Healthcare IT Transition Group COO Martin Jensen. We'll also be taking your questions, so feel free to fire away. I'll be hosting the event.

Don't miss the chance to get cutting-edge insights on portal development--sign up today! [2] - Anne

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Links:

[1] [https://event.on24.com/eventRegistration/EventLobbyServlet?](https://event.on24.com/eventRegistration/EventLobbyServlet?target=registration.jsp&eventid=114170&sessionid=1&key=8ED472DAE6595FF797914F15367A7E7B&partnerref=FierceHealthcare)

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