

Foreword I

It has often been stated that the hospital and its associated information system is the most complex organizational structure created by people. Therefore, it should not come as any surprise that the implementation of successful healthcare information management systems has lagged commercial, banking, and other nonhealthcare information systems.

Computer-based systems for the management of healthcare information began in the 1960s. During the past four decades, the requirements for healthcare information management systems have continually changed due to frequent major advances in medical technology and the vicissitudes of healthcare legislation. Important changes in medical technology and in healthcare legislation require flexible information management systems that can provide timely and appropriate enhancements.

There is little question that efficient information management systems are essential for the provision of modern, high-quality, cost-effective patient care. High-quality care requires online, clinical decision support for the physician while entering medical orders that are not only consistent with up-to-date, evidence-based, clinical-practice guidelines, but that also minimize the occurrence of drug–drug interactions and medication errors. Cost-effective patient care requires ready access to patient record data whenever and wherever needed by the healthcare professionals. Satisfying all such requirements is possible only with computer-based patient records. Cost-effective care cannot be supported by paper-based patient records that often contain illegible notes and are very time consuming for the physician who needs to search for relevant past data in the bulky paper chart of a long-term patient with a chronic disease.

The implementation of a healthcare information management system is further complicated by the intensive training required of its user healthcare professionals to change their habits and behavior. Users of the system must be frequently retrained to exploit new system enhancements to survive in an increasingly competitive healthcare environment. However, since most healthcare professionals are now computer literate, and most physicians now use computers in their offices, the acceptance of a healthcare information system is less of a problem now than it was a decade ago.

Based on my personal experience since the 1960s with healthcare information management systems, I believe the experiences and wisdom of experts from some of the most advanced systems in the world, which are contained in the third edition of this very practical guide, will be of inestimable help to anyone involved in implementing a new healthcare information management system or in operating an existing system.

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