Letter to the Editor

Learning From Lessons on Applying Information Technology in Organ Transplant: A Stepping Stone to Achieve Electronic Health Record Meaningful Use

To the Editor:

We read with interest the study by Zier et al on automated referral of impending brain deaths to an organ procurement organization (OPO) using an electronic clinical decision support system (CDSS) (1). The study reports on the evaluation of a home-grown CDSS and how it worked as an effective tool for implementation of a recognized best practice in the organ donation process (i.e. timely referral of potential organ donors to an OPO). This is very valuable because effective management of scarce resources of deceased donors can provide ample opportunities for saving lives of potential organ recipients. We thank the authors for sharing their experience of CDSS use in the organ transplant domain. This study, however, has cited some CDSS applications in medical domains other than organ transplantation. Therefore, we would like to draw the authors' attention to recent reviews on the application and impact of transplant-specific CDSSs in the organ transplant domain (2,3).

Through an extensive, systematic literature search from 1990 to December 2015, we found 27 articles describing the deployment of health information technology (HIT), including CDSSs, in organ transplantation (2). Only 10 had systematically evaluated their systems (3). Existing evidence shows that organ transplantation has benefited from HIT systems, especially CDSSs, with respect to improved efficiency, safety, and cost-effectiveness of care. The Zier et al (1) study in fact adds to this body of knowledge. HIT systems can potentially strengthen every aspect of this multidisciplinary, complex, chronic care, from organ procurement to frequent follow-ups for recipients (2). These systems can remove duplicate works, fill the gaps in the communication and coordination, or support providers in implementing guideline-based practices, for example. As such, "next generation" transplant clinics will truly depend on the power of HIT systems if they are about to afford lifelong, evidence-based care for this growing patient population (4).

Like any other intervention in medicine, HIT systems as well should be the subject of rigorous evaluations (5). As our review pointed out (3), we still need a stronger evidence base and explicit knowledge on where and how HIT systems should successfully be deployed in this specific domain of healthcare. In the era of striving to achieve meaningful use of an electronic health record (EHR) (6), we need to learn from each other in order to be able to pave the path for more comprehensive, usable, intelligent, and advanced systems in organ transplantation. To this end, we call developers and researchers to disseminate their experiences on the use of HIT and impact on organ transplant settings; learning from each other will be a stepping stone to achieve meaningful use of EHR in the organ transplant domain.

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Disclosure

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