

Three Principles for Meaningful Healthcare Reform

Breakthroughs in technology have revolutionized every aspect of healthcare from discovery to the bedside. Clinical research discovery teams are globally interconnected like never before, and the hope of personalized medicine tailored to each individual through the genomics revolution is coming closer to reality. These advances, however, without a robust commitment to investment in health information technology (health IT) including support for the systems and databases of the National Library of Medicine (NLM) will undermine efforts to truly modernize the nation's healthcare.

For nearly 35 years, NLM has supported informatics research and training and the application of advanced computing and informatics to biomedical research and healthcare delivery including a variety of telemedicine projects. NLM has played a pivotal role in creating and nurturing the field of medical informatics, most notably through the creation of GenBank and a wide array of related scientific data and analysis tools which provide critical infrastructure for the nation's researchers. This critical infrastructure will be the key to advances in medicine in the future. Furthermore, NLM works closely with the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONCHIT) to promote the adoption of interoperable electronic health records which have the potential to make care more portable and efficient.

The Medical Library Association (MLA) and the Association of Academic Health Sciences Libraries (AAHSL) recommend the following 3 principles for consideration as the dialogue over healthcare reform moves forward:

- Robust investment in health IT improves healthcare quality and lowers healthcare costs.
- NLM's infrastructure of databases, networks, and systems is critical to clinical excellence, advancement of biomedical science, and education of the nation's healthcare consumers. NLM must receive significant, ongoing support to ensure that its databases are properly maintained, expanded, and easily accessible to the public and health professionals.
- Transparency must be maintained for federally funded medical research through efforts like the National Institutes of Health's public access policy to ensure that the advancement of science fuels future discovery and benefits the public which funded it.

MLA is a nonprofit, educational organization, comprised of health sciences information professionals with more than 4,000 members worldwide. Through its programs and services, MLA provides lifelong educational opportunities, supports a knowledgebase of health information research, and works with a global network of partners to promote the importance of quality information for improved health to the health care community and the public.

AAHSL is composed of the directors of the libraries of 142 accredited American and Canadian medical schools that belong to the Association of American Medical Colleges AAMC. AAHSL's goals are to promote excellence in academic health sciences libraries and to ensure that the next generation of health practitioners is trained in information-seeking skills that enhance the quality of healthcare delivery.