

eHealth Initiative's Annual Conference: moneyball and big data

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As eHealth Initiative's Annual Conference kicked off last Tuesday in Orlando, Fla., it was clear that the two-day event would offer a candid forum for health care leaders, state representatives and vendors to share the highs and lows, as well as what lies ahead in the ever-shifting world of health information technology.

eHealth Initiative Chief Executive Officer Jennifer Bordenick's welcome address focused heavily on the perseverance the health care industry must have to achieve meaningful, lasting results. Despite major breakthroughs in innovation over the last several years, she said the industry is "starting to see some cracks around the edges." Bordenick emphasized the uncertainty that surrounds health IT as well as the frustration felt by the private and public sector struggling to implement health care reform, ICD-10 and meaningful use amid strapped budgets and failed projects. She didn't sugarcoat the introduction; the conference would be a place to discuss successes and pitfalls with "brutal honesty and humility."

Still, Bordenick's ultimate message was one of hope and encouragement. She took a few minutes to highlight a renowned group of political and cultural icons, all who experienced major defeats before breaking ground – Abraham Lincoln, Steve Jobs, Steven Spielberg, Michael Jordan and Jerry Seinfeld.

"It's not about just getting it right," said Bordenick. "It's about perseverance – taking the time to get it right."

In his keynote address, Optum's Group Executive Vice President Andrew Slavitt discussed the opportunities and challenges of technology and big data. He said the good news is that the next generation of providers expects to use technology in their jobs instead avoiding it. The challenge is that geographic adoption of technology could get worse as more technologies are introduced, due to limited resources.

Slavitt said current health technologies are being built to fulfill the needs of the old world instead of the new, and emphasized the importance of understanding the needs of the dual eligible population – about 10 million Americans who qualify for both Medicare and Medicaid, and "whose health and social needs are at the root of almost everyone's health care costs."

According to Slavitt, the health care industry would benefit from adopting a moneyball approach to data analytics. For those unfamiliar with Michael Lewis' book or the 2011 motion picture starring Brad Pitt, moneyball refers to how baseball's Oakland Athletics used heavy analytics to assemble a team who went on to win a majority of games in 2001 on a limited budget. Instead of relying on typical batting averages and game statistics, the A's professionalized data and analytics, and developed a data strategy.

Slavitt also noted that adoption and implementation of technology will accelerate once data speaks the language of margin and marketshare. He said with a moneyball approach and investment in health IT, keeping one in five dual eligible individuals in their homes instead of health institutions is an achievable goal, and one that would drastically reduce the \$360 billion spent on their care.

In closing his address, Slavitt asked the crowd if big data was hype (more promise than will be realized), a fad (gone in five years), or a trend (true, lasting change). While the majority of the attendees believed big data to be a trend, Slavitt leaned toward hype. He said at this time, big data has a major lack of interoperability, standards, severity data, and linked data, all of which "hurts patient care" and "drains the usefulness out of data." He said until a solution achieves these needed components, the risks of big data can be compared to "playing with fire."

To read more about the eHealth Initiative Annual Conference, please read the full [analyst recap](#).