

Overview of the 2011 eHealth Initiative Annual Conference

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The eHealth Initiative (eHi) convened at the Omni Shoreham Hotel in Washington D.C. on January 19-20 for its **2011 Annual Conference: Turning Policy into Action**. With casual glance around the ballroom, one could quickly see that turning policy into action was more than a clever tagline. Sitting side by side were providers, insurers, government bureaucrats, consultants, entrepreneurs, vendors, and innovators with a vested interest in a successful American health care system.

The eHi is a membership driven, not-for-profit that focuses on driving improvement in the quality, safety, and efficiency of health care through information and information technology. It engages an array of stakeholders in the health care market to have discussions on progress and innovation. In total, the conference boasted eight panel discussions and two keynote addresses, all equally informative. On average, each panel had four guests.

The first impression one gained from the many discussions was that stakeholders, representing nearly all sectors of the market, feel rushed by reform. Nowhere was this more evident than in discussions about meaningful use. Providers and vendors are feeling the pinch from federal standards and timelines that many believe are unattainable. The panel was dominated by those who claimed it was not feasible to attain meaningful use with a certain vendor in the timeframe allotted.

Secondly, it was clear that a wholesale cultural change was necessary to really reform health care in the United States. This was dwelt on by the majority of panelists, and will be the subject of a separate blog posted in the coming days.

Thirdly, there was broad agreement among the conferees about the role of the patient in the reformed health care model. Specifically, it was contended that patients are an "underutilized resource" who must be engaged to make any reform successful. These broad themes gave way to other meaningful panel discussions including: the outlook for health care policy in the 2011 Congress, a conversation with the chief privacy officer on privacy and health information technology (HIT), care coordination in the real world, creating accountable care organizations, and HIT progress and barriers at the state level. Topics covered in all panels will be highlighted in an analyst recap from my colleague and fellow conference attendee, Amanda White.

As the highlight of the two-day conference, the eHealth Initiative secured National Coordinator for Health Information Technology **Dr. David Blumenthal** as the keynote speaker. Dr. Blumenthal focused on the advent of what he calls the "era of meaningful use." Shaking off the apprehensions of the harried crowd, Blumenthal shared a high-level overview of meaningful use that focused on benefits and improving our health care system. Blumenthal used his time to assure that a purpose lies behind the swift timetable for achieving meaningful use. The obvious purpose is the enhancement of care for Americans. For Blumenthal, a fortuitous consequence of the push for meaningful use is the widespread collaboration of the health care industry to achieve a common purpose.

According to Blumenthal, the "era of meaningful use," for all the difficulties it has incurred, has a transformative impact on American health care delivery in which quality will be unmatched by any single reform in history. Furthermore, the two-day conference made clear that policy has undoubtedly turned into action. Indeed, to amend Blumenthal's phrase, the "era of meaningful use" is an era of widespread action.

For GovWin's in-depth analyst recap, click [here](#).