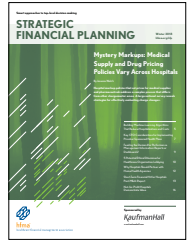


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Feeding the Demand for Performance Management Information: Reports or Dashboards?

By Jeff Goldstein

When dashboards are well-designed and produced with ease, they allow more time to analyze what the data mean, rather than spending hours determining what the data are.

With healthcare data flowing from multiple sources—such as patient records, claims and payment information, cost data, and manufacturer and pharmaceutical databases—hospitals and health systems face the high-stress challenge of using data to support their organizations without burying stakeholders in useless information. New tools and systems are available to help hospitals and health systems capture, integrate, manage, and report clinical, operational, and financial data that monitors and predicts performance and supports effective decision-making.

With the implementation of each new tool or system comes the expectation that dashboards and reports will be produced with greater ease to provide performance visibility and insight. And that expectation is a fair one, given the time and resources these new systems require.



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But before that occurs, decisions must be made about how to share and present data meaningfully.

Reports: Traditional But Relevant

With dashboards growing in popularity, what is the role of reports in performance management? Most healthcare professionals believe reports are still relevant tools and use them on a consistent basis. Reports should be used to tell detailed stories that are too complex to communicate in dashboard format. Reports give readers additional information to make connections within story lines. Often, users drill through dashboards to see details that are rendered as reports. Reports may have visual elements, but they don't rely exclusively on visualization as dashboards do. Reports also include background information and context, while dashboards tend to focus on specifics like KPIs. And while reports might have actionable elements, dashboards are specifically designed to be actionable and drive decision-making.

Dashboards: The Silver Bullet?

At their foundational level, dashboards serve one purpose: Boil it down so we know what's going on! When dashboards emerged in the 1990s, they were viewed as the visual, on-demand alternative to traditional reports. As dashboards have grown more sophisticated and user-friendly, their benefits include the following capabilities:

- > View information in an easily consumable, visual manner that can be tailored for different users.
- > Draw insights and conclusions more readily from graphic presentations of data on single computer screens.
- > Drill down, filter, and sort critical business data more quickly and easily.
- > Interact intuitively with data in easy-to-understand formats.
- > Compare data from different sources and across extended timelines more readily.

Healthcare performance management dashboards tend to fall into three categories depending on the user.

Management dashboards. For hospital leadership, these dashboards provide one-stop-shopping overviews of hospital performance, operations, and financial position, including statistics such as admissions, payer trends, and service line profitability. Drilling into detail is an option along with links to other dashboards.

Service line dashboards. For service line or department managers and hospital leadership, these dashboards allow users to choose specific service lines and then select key metrics such as budgets, actuals, and targets associated with cases, patient days, charges, and net revenue. These dashboards may also show data such as the top DRGs by variable cost so that areas can be pinpointed for possible attention.

Clinical dashboards. For finance teams and hospital leadership, these dashboards display indicators associated with excess days and key metrics, such as variable costs, length of stay, and readmissions.

Dashboards in Action

When dashboards are well-designed and produced with ease, they allow more time to analyze what the data mean, rather than spending hours determining what the data are. With a limited amount of real estate available on performance dashboards and high expectations about their ability to provide impactful information at a glance, an example may be helpful (view the web extra below).

Web extra

View sample management dashboards at hfma.org/sfp/managementdashboards

Kaufman Hall's surveys of hospital leaders and managers, such as 2017 *State of Cost Transformation in U.S. Hospitals: An Urgent Call to Accelerate Action*, report that inability to access actionable data is hampering decision-making on many key issues. Ensuring that report and dashboard formats are structured appropriately is a first step toward eliminating this challenge. //

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