



## **Module 10: Health Information Technology**

### Part 4: Health Data and Policy

So for this module we're going to talk about how HIT can influence public health and policy.

The goals of this module are to review the meaning and purpose of HIT, review examples of policy positively influencing public health, and to learn how health data can help inform and craft policy and initiatives.

To review again the purpose of HIT, the purpose is to improve efficiency and quality of care. Anything that enhances health services and improved data collection through technology could be considered HIT.

So, we know that policy can have an impact on public health. For example, the development of government regulations for things like car manufacturers to include safety features like seat belts has drastically reduced the rate of vehicular deaths since 1970. So, what about policy and HIT? Now that we're generating so much clinical data on patients, how can we use this to create evidence-based policy?

So very quickly, what is evidence-based policy? There's a lot of different definitions, floating around. It's different than consensus based or reactive policy. It's really only been in modern practice for the last half century or so and there are different understandings for what it is. In contrast to policies that are created as a reaction to something or as a result of public demand, evidence-based policies are laws that are enacted as a result of proof of theory from a scientific study that shows a desired outcome like gross behavior change might be achieved if we implement this law.

A great example of an evidence-based policy was in 2008 the Clean Indoor Air Act law was implemented in the city of Philadelphia and resulted in a 15% drop in smoking rates which equals about 40,000 Philadelphians giving up tobacco in less than five years. HIT will and already does contribute to the formation of evidence-based policy.

So, we're going to talk about meaningful use in tobacco. Meaningful use is the electronic health record incentive program that we talked about earlier. Tobacco use is a Healthy People 2020 objective. The goal is to reduce illness, disability and death related to tobacco use and secondhand smoke exposure. What does this have to do with health data?

So, one of the measures of meaningful use of an electronic health record, for which providers and health practices are receiving those financial incentives for meeting, is recording the smoking status of their patients. Historically the provider would note this in the patient's social history but now it has to be recorded as discrete data, meaning it can't be recorded as free text in the record note. It has to be selected from a drop down list of options of smoking status which includes, "Unknown if ever smoked". Recording this on every



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single patient will give a very clear idea of not only prevalence but demographic and risk factors for diseases related to smoking which can then be used to help craft policy.

The meaningful use in cancer registries, data collected within EHR about patients who have been diagnosed with cancer will be compiled by local cancer registries. These registries enable public health professionals to understand and address the cancer burden more effectively. This kind of vast compilation of data can also help researchers understand not only how to more effectively treat current instances of cancer, but also to help to project future cases of cancer which can help in early detection, if not prevention. This is something called predictive modeling that we're going to talk about next.

And to review what we learned about in this module, we reviewed the meaning and purpose of HIT, we talked about examples of policy positively influencing public health, and we learned how health data can help inform and craft policy and initiatives.