

Better decisions, better management and better training

Reported by Yong Cui

The reform course of hospital management and IT construction in Shanghai Changning Maternity and Infant Health Institute during these years is also the reflection of the current state of Chinese healthcare IT construction. Mr. Sheldon Dorenfest, CEO of Dorenfest Healthcare Consulting Group, raised his opinion of Chinese healthcare IT, "Since established in 2006 in China, Dorenfest Healthcare Consulting Group has visited more than a hundred hospitals in seventeen cities in China, interviewed more than a hundred leaders in Chinese healthcare industry, and had a better understanding of Chinese healthcare reform, healthcare management, and the current state, future goal, current problems and ameliorable opportunities of healthcare service." He considered: "During the recent 10 years, China has done a lot on healthcare IT, and got a fast development as well as a great success, however, there are still many problems to solve."

1. Deficiency of scientific plans and decisions

The largest obstacle in the current Chinese healthcare IT construction should be the deficiency of scientific plans and decisions. Many IT projects don't have complete plans and scientific decisions. Hospitals don't know how to purchase software effectively. When purchasing software, many hospitals would ask their suppliers, "What should we do?", or ask them to assist making out the IT construction plan for the particular hospitals. However, the software suppliers only understand their software system; they don't know the practical situation and demands of the hospitals. Thus before purchasing the software, hospitals should first decide scientifically what they want to do and what the goal is, and then evaluate whether the software could satisfy their goal and demands. That should be the most effective way. Besides, an effective management team should be established for healthcare IT construction, which includes the personnel from healthcare management, IT, clinical care and logistics, so that IT, healthcare management, clinical care and patient service can be combined in the IT system.

2. Deficiency of capabilities and methods of reform management

After the implementation of healthcare IT system, the reform management is relatively deficient in China. The purpose of IT utilization is to make the work more efficient, so the original work process should be combed and optimized to match the IT system. However in China, many hospitals haven't managed the reform well, that is, they don't know what to add and what to subtract from the whole work process, thus leading to redundancy and confusion in the work.

3. Hospital management and clinical care should be combined

The core of hospital is medical care, so healthcare IT system must support the clinical work. However in China hospitals, many IT stuffs don't pay enough attention to the clinical stuffs; doctors often complained that IT system doesn't support clinical care and research well. This situation must be changed in the future. In China, healthcare IT started from finance management, and the key of Chinese medical care system is "pay first and get medical care later". Thus, the financial payment system becomes extremely important in the whole medical care process. Nowadays, hospitals in China have relatively complete finance system; so on the basis of finance system, the next step should be developing electronic medical records and other clinical functions gradually. During the clinical IT construction, how to involve the clinical clients in the IT construction is the key of the success of clinical IT system implementation.

4. It's very important to train the users

It can often be observed that, in hospitals, the doctors who are interested in IT can use the IT system well; however, those who lack IT concepts may encounter problems when using IT system. However good the IT system is, if the user can not use it correctly, the system is worthless. So user training should be very important, which can increase the recognitions and compliances of the IT system by the clinical stuffs, and develop the function of IT system thoroughly.

Opinions on current medical care reform

Mr. Sheldon Dorenfest, one of the world's foremost experts in healthcare service systems, has personally consulted with the governments of the USA, France, England, Australia, Canada and other areas in the world, on a variety of healthcare issues. He also pays close attention to the medical care reform in China. He thinks that, the primary problem of Chinese healthcare reform is that the government and healthcare management organizations should take more responsibilities and invest more funds. The ordinary people in China pay the medical care fees by themselves; although there are some commercial medical care insurances, the ratio of the fees paid by individuals is still very high. So the government should increase the input in medical care, especially providing the poor and rural population more medical care service, and paying more medical care expenses to give them a better medical care service. For the Mid-class population, they often wait for several hours for the doctors and finally only see them for some minutes, but the attitude of the doctors is not good at all. This situation will make the Mid-class feel that they have paid the medical care fees, but not getting a good service; the result of which will definitely lead to the decrease of medical care satisfaction and the deterioration of doctor-patient relationship. For the hospitals, because the main income of them comes from the pharmaceuticals and the medical examination, the input from government to hospitals is severely insufficient, so that hospitals and doctors increase their incomes through an improper way. This phenomenon is not right, which must be corrected. However, this phenomenon can

not be stopped in a short time; it needs a normal and effective way to replace gradually. Thus, to realize all these alterations, reform is required, to improve the quality and level of medical care service and satisfy patients, hospitals and doctors. This reform can only be led by the government. Moreover, healthcare IT is the support of the reform. It's not only an important tool to improve the quality and level of the medical care service, but also the most effective and economic way for the government to supervise and manage the healthcare industry.

The United States has input much fund in the healthcare IT construction; they also waste a lot. They have much successful experience, and also unsuccessful lessons. China should borrow the successful experience from the U.S., and avoid the unsuccessful lessons of them, using the limited fund to get as good results as the U.S. did from investment. Last year, the U.S. spent at least 30 billion dollars on the healthcare IT construction, which means that, the U.S. spent on the healthcare IT with 20% of the total amount of Chinese healthcare input. But China doesn't have that much fund; China needs a more effective and economic healthcare IT.

Compared with the U.S. healthcare IT construction started from the 1960's, Hong Kong healthcare IT construction was later for at least 20 years. However, in the beginning of the 21st century, Hong Kong established healthcare IT system that is much more effective than that of the U.S., after spending about 10 years' time and fund which was much less than the U.S. did. Thus the ongoing Chinese medical care reform should absorb the experience and lessons from the U.S. and learn from Hong Kong especially, so as to make less mistakes, take the right path and gain a more economic, effective and better result of the future Chinese healthcare IT construction.

At present, the medical care reform conducted by the government has been ongoing for more than 3 years; however its progress is very slow, and is still at a pilot state, which leads to a situation that the whole national medical care industry and healthcare IT construction don't have much progress. "IT construction is the helper, supporter and implementator of the medical care reform." healthcare IT could make the whole system more effective, improve the quality of medical care service, cut down mistakes, and improve doctor-patient relationship. However healthcare IT can not lead the reform; medical care reform needs the impulse of the government decisions.

Finally, Mr. Dorenfest said, "The key of the Chinese healthcare IT success is that: better decisions and plans, better IT management and better users' training."