

## Healthcare Providers Learn IT's Value In Patient Care

Pittsburgh's new Quality and Information Technology Center teaches healthcare professionals to apply data and IT to improve medical care.

By Neil Versel, [InformationWeek](#)  
December 19, 2012

A new training center in Pittsburgh is trying to teach healthcare professionals to apply data and technology to improve the quality of care. Launched this month, the [QIT Center](#) -- standing for quality and information technology -- will serve people who deal directly with patients, from desk clerks to licensed practical nurses to physicians. "These are people already on the front lines," said Dr. Bruce Block, chief medical information officer of the **Jewish Healthcare Foundation**, one of the QIT Center's patrons.

"The idea is to get students from all the health professions," added Karen Wolk Feinstein, president and CEO of the Jewish Healthcare Foundation.

Other QIT Center partners include the **Pittsburgh Regional Health Initiative (PRHI)**, which seeks to adapt the [Toyota Production System](#) to healthcare, and Health Careers Futures, an affiliate of Jewish Healthcare Foundation. The foundation and the publicly chartered Allegheny County Community Infrastructure and Tourism Fund each contributed \$200,000 to the QIT Center.

Even before its official grand opening, the center had provided seminars and workshops for dozens of medical students, emergency medical technicians and skilled nursing personnel. "The QIT Center is up and running in a bigger way than we ever imagined," Feinstein told *InformationWeek Healthcare*.

Feinstein founded the PRHI in 1997 with then-Alcoa chairman and CEO Paul O'Neill, who went on to serve as U.S. treasury secretary during the first two years of the George W. Bush administration and has long been an advocate for reducing medical errors through data-driven process optimization. "The main focus for us has always been quality improvement," Feinstein said.

Starting in February, the QIT Center will be offering an ongoing series of 10-week Health Innovators Fellowship programs to engage young, aspiring entrepreneurs in health IT. "It's longer than a hackathon and not as long as a full semester," said Brian Turcsanyi, director of technology and analytics at PHRI.

The fellowships, which initially will focus on data visualization, are intended to "feed the entrepreneurial spirit" by sharing expertise and providing very early-stage startups with business contacts, according to Turcsanyi. He called it an "incubator before an incubator."

At the heart of quality improvement and education is data. The PRHI long has mined aggregated patient records from an independent state agency called Pennsylvania Health Care Cost Containment Council, but now it, like anyone else, can download regional and national data from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS).

Many more databases have become accessible since the federal government "democratized" massive stores of health information with the [Health Data Initiative](#), according to Feinstein. "It's pretty amazing the data sets that CMS is releasing," she said.

This publicly available data is helping hospitals reduce readmissions. Healthcare providers and payers are noticing irregularities for people with chronic diseases that might otherwise have gone undetected, Feinstein said. "They can do 'hot spotting' in their own communities and beyond," looking for high concentrations of certain conditions.

The QIT Center will take advantage of PHRI's existing "Tomorrow's Healthcare" educational portal. "Tomorrow's Healthcare is our online management tool," explained Turcsanyi. The portal offers what he called "Facebook-like collaboration," including a cloud-based data dashboard and scorecard called Data Tracker.

"We try to make it as simple and as user-friendly as we can," Turcsanyi said. "You need to aggregate data and stratify it into care conditions."

*Clinical, patient engagement, and consumer apps promise to re-energize healthcare. Also in the new, all-digital [Mobile Power](#) issue of InformationWeek Healthcare: Comparative effectiveness research taps the IT toolbox to compare treatments to determine which ones are most effective. (Free registration required.)*

URL: <http://www.informationweek.com/healthcare/leadership/healthcare-providers-learn-its-value-in/240145014>