# Focus on Goals, Not Technology

## BY THOMAS C. LAWRY

T hroughout today's healthcare system, managers, physicians, and marketing departments are asking themselves: How can we make the best use of Web services? Unfortunately, many are focusing on the technology involved. But the Web revolution in healthcare is not really about computer technology. It's about improving communication with patients, about freeing employees from inefficient work processes, and about strengthening mission while improving the bottom line.

In the purest sense, technology is a capital and operating expense. It does not, in itself, add value to a healthcare organization. Value is created only when leaders use the technology to improve the communication and work processes that are fundamental to the organization's success.

A typical organization, once it has decided to adopt Web services, evaluates the preparedness of its current information system. It is equally important that such an organization:

• Decide *which* information should be Web enabled, and which should not

• Evaluate the preparedness of *employees* to embrace the necessary changes

### SIX FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

Whether the organization in question is a hospital department or a healthcare system, it should move into Internet or intranet services* only after it has answered six fundamental questions.

**What Are the Top Information-Sharing Issues Your Organization Faces?** These issues may be either "internal" (e.g., improving staff communications in a manner that also reduces administrative costs) or "external" (e.g., providing prospective

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patients with information that both helps them take better care of themselves and induces them to use your organization's services when necessary). Decide which of these issues are of strategic importance to the organization.

**Which Information-Sharing Processes Is Your Organization Currently Using to Address These Issues?** Assess the efficiency of these processes. You may find, if you are trying to improve staff communications, for example, that your organization's current process both floods employees with useless information, on one hand, and makes it difficult for them to access valuable information, on the other. You might be able to reduce costs and improve communications by replacing that system with one that allows employees themselves to decide which pieces of information are valuable and to access them easily.

**Can Your Organization Measure the Benefits It Would Get from Using Web Services?** Look for definable benefits that can be seen with any Web application. Will placing information on an intranet increase productivity or improve informed decision making? Will putting information on the Internet both increase consumer use and reduce cost per interaction? To measure results, look for lowered costs, increased productivity, and reduced cycle times, along with improvements in decision making and in customer satisfaction and loyalty.

But never assume that Web-enabled information is automatically superior to other types. If you can't specify the benefits your organization would get from switching to Web services, don't switch. Even in a wired world, some things are best left to face-to-face or paper-based communications.

**Does Your Organization Have a Web Services Team in Place?** Of course, it's important to have a skilled technical staff. Equally important, however, are representatives from clinical, marketing, communications, process improvement, and business operations.

Develop an approach to Web initiatives that puts key players on the same team. A "key player" is one who has expertise (or at least an interest) in the process to be changed. If, for example,

*The *Internet* is the computer network that links individuals, businesses, government agencies, and private organizations around the world. An *intranet* is a computer network linking the members of a single organization. See Thomas C. Lawry, "'Web Revolution' Is Changing Healthcare," *Health Progress*, May-June 1999, pp. 12-13; and "'Intranets' Bring the Revolution Home," *Health Progress*, July-August 1999, pp. 13-15.