



# Lessons Learned by Healthcare Organizations During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Takeaways from Massachusetts Health & Hospital Association  
& Dimensional Insight webinar.

*Moderated by Forrester Senior Healthcare Analyst Jeff Becker*

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# | Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 led to a massive transformation for healthcare organizations.

Health systems raced to move from retrospective to real-time reporting of key metrics, and they also had to quickly work to transform processes; such as accelerating the adoption of telemedicine and better understanding care coordination and patient flow to other care settings.

Forrester Senior Healthcare Analyst Jeff Becker moderated a roundtable with Massachusetts hospital leaders to discuss their takeaways from the first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic and what their organizations would be focusing on moving forward. We asked Jeff five questions about the lessons learned, and what is in store for hospitals in 2021.



## How well-prepared do you think healthcare organizations were when the COVID-19 pandemic hit as it relates to the data they had on hand and their ability to derive meaningful value from it?

Healthcare organizations (HCOs) faced immense challenges in the early innings of the pandemic, and were largely unprepared for the analytics demands that the situation created. In the earliest days, HCOs were focused on meeting public health reporting requirements that sought daily submissions of test positivity rate, confirmed cases, bed availability, and mortality.

Beyond public health reporting, analytics teams were fielding demands from organizational leaders to establish projection models to forecast week-by-week demand for beds, critical supplies, and staff. With limited availability of pretrained models in the market capable of supporting these demands, analytics teams struggled to deliver a solution.

Today, HCOs are looking outside of their organizations to streamline patient discharge by analyzing data from the post-acute care environment. As hospital capacity once again climbs to 100% for many health systems, creating a data-driven patient throughput strategy that includes post-acute bed availability is becoming critical to maximizing acute bed use.



## What are some of the biggest lessons that healthcare organizations can learn from 2020 around data and technology?

The most problematic element of our health IT strategy today remains data sharing, not data analytics. Health systems struggled to report key metrics up to state and national public health agencies. They also struggled to establish data-sharing strategies across the continuum in their communities. Moving forward, HCOs will do well to establish a data strategy that creates a full picture of the continuum of care, inclusive of virtual care, ambulatory care, acute care, and post-acute care.



### **What are some ways that healthcare providers can leverage their data to better engage patients and meet their needs?**

Healthcare organizations are quickly learning that data can be a meaningful differentiator as we collectively scale virtual care and digital front-door strategies. Today, healthcare organizations are investing in tools that will help them identify patients within their communities who are eligible for remote patient monitoring or chronic disease management programs. From here, they are using data to personalize communication strategies to enroll these patients, and they are using internet of things (IoT) and chatbot-derived, patient-generated health data to maximize the performance of these programs.

These data assets will one day flow seamlessly into population health and patient flow systems to help HCOs pinpoint underserved populations, forecast deterioration of individual patients, and optimize treatment pathways from home to hospital and back.



### **Many healthcare organizations have almost too much data on hand. How can they not let this data overwhelm them, but instead use it to make quick and impactful decisions?**

Now, we are seeing HCOs aggregate disparate data sources into a unified data lake, typically on public cloud infrastructure. We're also seeing increased adoption of Fast Healthcare Interoperability Resources (FHIR) as a data model by these public cloud vendors, which helps ensure HCOs can use analytics tools and services from a variety of vendors without too much data preparation work. Lastly, public cloud vendors are cultivating analytics marketplaces to help ensure that healthcare organizations are able to take action on this data more quickly. In order to benefit from that work, HCOs need to invest in services that will aggregate and standardize their data silos in a centralized FHIR-based data store.



## What are some of the areas in which healthcare organizations can make the biggest gains from analytics in 2021?

The potential is seemingly immeasurable across multiple functional areas. The largest area of opportunity for analytics will be optimizing virtual care operations, either as an independent service line or integrated into existing clinical specialties. Analytics will help HCOs grow revenue streams stemming from both telehealth and remote patient monitoring services, and will help grow patient enrollment, utilization, acquisition, and retention.

There are additional gains to be made in the study of patient throughput, including establishing a data strategy to analyze bottlenecks in the care journey—be it the ER, PACU, or discharge process—and optimizing the next best action across the care team to address those bottlenecks. These “command center”-style analytics tools will improve our ability to coordinate care at a much more granular level and will yield a reduced length of stay and increased bed capacity.

Finally, supply chain management has been a notably problematic area during the pandemic and will continue to be problematic as vaccinations arrive that require ultra-cold storage. Expect the supply chain to be the focus of increased analytics opportunities as demand forecasting and IoT-enabled supply chain management mature.



# About Dimensional Insight

Dimensional Insight® is a leading provider of analytics, data management, and performance management solutions, offering a complete portfolio of capabilities ranging from data integration and modeling to sophisticated reporting, analytics, and dashboards. The company is a seven-time Best in KLAS winner in healthcare business intelligence and analytics, most recently ranking #1 in 2020. Founded in 1989, Dimensional Insight has thousands of customer organizations worldwide. Dimensional Insight consistently ranks as a top performing analytics organization by customers and industry analysts in its core market segments including healthcare, manufacturing, and beverage alcohol. For more information, please visit <https://www.dimins.com/>.

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