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Brian Phillips
Chief Solutions Architect
NETSCOUT

Supporting HL7 to reduce interoperability and IT performance roadblocks

The proliferation of applications and electronic medical records (EMRs) is putting pressure on healthcare IT shops to add Health Level 7 (HL7) as needed and keep the communications and interoperability standard performing optimally. Failure to do so is costly for healthcare organizations.

Patients and clinicians want reliable access to electronic patient records, whether it’s a surgeon calling-up CAT scan results or a patient questioning a billing statement. “A lot of consumers get used to fast turnarounds, and when that doesn’t happen, or they have to make multiple phone calls to get something scheduled or resolved, their satisfaction level drops dramatically,” explained Brian Phillips, chief solutions architect at NETSCOUT.

One way to prevent operational and performance issues between dissimilar systems is by using HL7, which is added to allow different systems to exchange patient information with each other using a common framework. As added assurance, healthcare organizations are investing in service assurance solutions that ensure HL7 availability and operation by monitoring communications traffic so any abnormalities are identified and mitigated before the patient and caregivers experience suffers.

WE CAN WORK IT OUT

Physicians are under constant pressure to accurately diagnose and properly treat patients the first time, or risk financial penalties. At the same time, increased workloads require more efficient workflows. This applies to all lines of business in the patient care continuum. When sharing of records are held up due to interoperability or performance assurance issues, frustrations run high. “The backlash is directed at IT,” Phillips said. “Patients and caregivers don’t want to know how hard it is, or that the vendors are using disparate systems. They just want everything to work.”

The patient experience also is impacted by originating application performance before it ever translates to HL7, including speed and security of EMRs at the point where care is given. Extending beyond these increasingly complex mixed backbones is the growing use of the Internet of Things (IoT) within healthcare. By providing patients with wearables and smart devices to monitor at-home treatment and compliance, IoT can strain already stretched connectivity and performance issues. Additionally, applications themselves are evolving, whether it’s by adding features like hands-free voice operation interfaces to existing tools or moving data assets to the cloud.

COMING TOGETHER THROUGH HL7

Phillips recommended IT and hospital operations work together toward greater interoperability, rather than viewing these applications as just IT’s domain. “HL7 is a great framework, but it still needs to be installed on all of these disparate systems and operate efficiently and security, so that it can be that bridge between disparate native data sources,” he said.

That requires communication and cooperation across all lines of business, regardless of users’ locations, usage or choice of vendors. In doing so, Phillips concluded, HL7 can serve as a “shared Rosetta Stone between data-sharing siloes.”

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About Netscout:

NETSCOUT SYSTEMS, INC. (NASDAQ: NTCT) is a leading provider of business assurance - a powerful combination of service assurance, cybersecurity, and business intelligence solutions - for today's most demanding service provider, enterprise and government networks. NETSCOUT's Adaptive Service Intelligence (ASI) technology continuously monitors the service delivery environment to identify performance issues and provides insight into network-based security threats, helping teams to quickly resolve issues that can cause business disruptions or impact user experience. NETSCOUT delivers unmatched service visibility and protects the digital infrastructure that supports our connected world. To learn more, visit www.netscout.com or follow @NETSCOUT on Twitter, Facebook, or LinkedIn.