

Untapped Opportunities for Actuaries in Health: The Year in Review

The mission for the Untapped Opportunities Work Group is to expand opportunities for actuaries in the broader health care industry by designing educational programs, pursuing new research opportunities, building organizational partnerships and branding the health care actuary. These efforts have been guided by a series of qualitative and quantitative research projects led by the market research firm GfK Healthcare (GfK). Over the last year we have worked hard to make sure each of the aspects of the mission have been addressed by at least one program spearheaded by the Untapped Opportunities (UO) Work Group.

Market Research

The UO team championed the GfK market research which provided a more in depth analysis of perceptions and potential roles of actuaries in the broader health care industry. The results of this study were presented in a report available on the SOA website. Results were summarized and presented to the membership in a free webcast in April. In addition, presentations of various aspects the results were incorporated into sessions at the SOA '10 Health Meeting in June.

Key findings include:

1. The “health care actuary” is an undervalued brand which needs to be strengthened in the broader health care industry.
2. Actuaries bring strong business and analytic skills to an industry that will continue to be highly data-driven.
3. Actuaries are perceived positively and are seen as having a neutral and objective voice.

The market research points to several areas of practice which currently have limited or no actuarial penetration, but are a good fit for our skill set:

- Wellness and disease management companies

- Comparative effectiveness research
- Health care analytics groups within health plans
- Health care providers (particularly ACOs and other large hospital systems)
- Management consultants working on large scale health care projects

Educational Programs

The research suggests that the marketplace feels that actuaries lack clinical skills. Partnering with the Health Section, the team responded quickly by contracting with Dr. Joel Shalowitz to develop a “Med School for Actuaries” curriculum. The first class was held at the Health Boot Camp in early November 2010, and was the most popular of the boot camp seminars.

Another area in which we need to strengthen our skills is clinical studies. While actuaries perform valuable research, academic and clinical studies are different animals. Joan Barrett presented at the SOA '10 Health Meeting on how to read and interpret clinical studies, and we continue to explore other ways to educate actuaries in this important area.

New Research Opportunities

The UO team has taken the lead on developing research that is targeted to expand brand awareness of health care actuaries in the industry and develop actuarial skill sets. One such research opportunity will be to investigate Massachusetts claims experience. The results of this research may have an impact on the implementation of health care reform.

Building on the path breaking work of Alan Mills, the team has prepared a Call for Papers developing applications using complexity science in the modeling of health care systems. Results of this call are expected to be available in mid-2011.

Building Organizational Partnerships

The responsibility of building organizational partnerships is shared between the SOA, the Section and motivated individuals. By supporting individuals in developing relationships, the

UO team feels they can make a difference in the relationships we build by jumpstarting the process.

The U O team has stepped up efforts to develop relationships in areas consistent with the research performed by GfK. This year, several members of the UO team have attended Accountable Care Organization (ACO) conferences in Washington DC and Los Angeles. Also in the area of ACOs, the SOA has joined the Dartmouth/Brookings ACO Learning network, an educational organization linking up key stakeholders in the ACO development space. The Massachusetts research project mentioned previously is a joint effort with several funding sources including the Commonwealth Fund. The team continues to work to identify other opportunities to showcase actuaries as speakers and to highlight actuarial research.

Branding the Health Care Actuary

Brand building is the responsibility of all but we follow the lead of the SOA in that regard. The Untapped Opportunities Work Group works closely with the Marketing and Market Development Plan (MMDP) and the new Viewpoints and Visibility team to “expand and brand” of the health care actuary. We are working with the Health Section to build non-traditional actuarial profiles for members to view and learn. Finally, we are working on a recruiter’s project to help non-actuarial health care executive recruiters to understand the skills of actuaries and the value we can bring to a variety of roles in the health industry.

Conclusion

In one short year, the Untapped Opportunities Work Group has accomplished a remarkable amount thanks to the dedication of the members of the team: Bob Cosway, Kate Fitch, Jennifer Gillespie, Francois-Joseph Poirier, Alice Rosenblatt, Mayur Shah, Sudha Shenoy, Judy Strachan Sara Teppema, Jim Toole and Meg Weber. In the future, the work group is being moved from strategic to operational. As part of that process, the team will mostly likely transition to become part of the Health Section, travelling full circle from where the initiative started four short years ago.

If there is one thing that is unfinished and needs to be carried forward it is the branding of the health care actuary as a distinct professional discipline. Combining business sensibility with the actuary's toolkit, who better than actuaries to bring quantitative discipline and unbiased integrity to address the challenges facing health benefit systems?

---Jim Toole, Chair of the Untapped Opportunities Work Group, November 2010