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Few Americans Using 'E-' Medical Records

Many aren't even sure their doctor offers the technology, new poll finds

NORWALK, Connecticut, USA--June 17, 2010— Despite years of hype around the issue, less than one in 10 American adults now utilize electronic medical records or turn to e-mail to contact their doctor, a new Harris Interactive/HealthDay poll finds.

Nearly half of respondents weren't even sure if their physician offered these technologies, according to the survey.

Still, most of those polled said they would like their doctors to access their medical records with the click of a mouse. On the other hand, only about a third (30 percent) believe their insurer should have that same access.

Overall, "the general public only has a vague idea, only a very limited understanding, of what all this is about," reasoned Humphrey Taylor, chairman of The Harris Poll, a service of Harris Interactive.

The poll was conducted online from June 8-10 among 2,035 U.S. adults.

Despite the Obama administration's campaign to expand the use of health information technology, public attitudes toward electronic medical records haven't budged much over the past few years, the poll shows.

This year, as in 2009, 78 percent of adults indicated that they "strongly" or "somewhat" agree that doctors should have access to their electronic medical records. In 2007, 80 percent were in agreement on physicians' access to those records.

But patients' use of various electronic functions remains very low. Only 9 percent can communicate with their doctors by e-mail, up from 4 percent in 2006. Eight percent can schedule a doctor's visit online, up from 3 percent, and 8 percent can get diagnostic test results by e-mail, up from 2 percent in 2006.

A little more than a quarter (28 percent) of those polled thought their doctor used electronic medical records, but 42 percent said they didn't know if their primary care physician had the technology.

Experts believe many consumers remain skeptical about the inappropriate use of health information stored and accessed electronically.

"Ideally, the government only allows 'covered entities' access to your entire health history, called your 'personal health information'," said Erin Stevenson, a digital health-care consultant at Redwood Medical Consulting in Bayside, Calif. But the law is vague and full of loopholes, he explained.

Yet Stevenson doesn't think consumer skepticism will impede wider use of the technology. In the end, he said, the technology "makes moving around a city, state, or changing doctors much easier," and it allows doctors to make quicker and better informed decisions.

But, as of now, Americans don't seem to appreciate the benefits of having their intimate health details stored in a computer vs. stowed away in file folders scattered across multiple doctors' offices, Taylor said.

"The policy wonks talk very persuasively about all of the improvements in quality that come from having a complete electronic medical record," he observed, but "that case has not really been made effectively to the public."

The survey also revealed regional differences, with more people in the West (35 percent) saying their primary-care doctor uses an electronic medical record than in other regions.

But with less than a tenth of American adults using electronic medical records, "the numbers are still very small," said Taylor, suggesting that the electronic "revolution" in health care is still in its infancy. But the numbers in some cases have doubled, and he expects that trend to accelerate over time.

In an editorial published last year in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, Dr. David Blumenthal, now the Obama administration's National Coordinator for Health Information Technology, noted that few providers have even basic electronic health records. Adoption of the technology has been slow, he explained, because of the cost of converting to an electronic records system, perceived lack of financial return, implementation issues, provider inertia and privacy and security concerns.

President Barack Obama authorized \$19 billion in stimulus funding over several years to speed doctors' and hospitals' move toward electronic records. However, the financial incentives are tied to new rules that many providers consider overly burdensome.

Over time, experts believe electronic medical records will make inroads in American medicine.

"There's no question; it's the future," Taylor said. "The question is 'How quickly do we get there?'"

Read the [full report](#) for all the details of the poll. HealthDay's news report is available [here](#). Full data on the poll and its methodology are available at [Harris Interactive](#).

TABLE 1
ATTITUDES TO ELECTRONIC MEDICAL RECORDS

“An electronic medical record (EMR) is a virtual health history, including illness, medical test results, allergies, prescription medication use, hospitalizations, etc. It can be used by health care providers to help manage medical conditions and avoid medical errors. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about electronic health records?”

Base: All adults

| | | Total Strongly/Somewhat Agree | Strongly Agree | Somewhat Agree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Somewhat Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--|---|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| All physicians treating me should have access to information contained in my EMR | % | 78 | 46 | 32 | 15 | 4 | 4 |
| An EMR would be a valuable tool to track the progress of my health | % | 71 | 34 | 38 | 21 | 4 | 4 |
| My health records are for my own use and should not be provided to other parties | % | 53 | 28 | 25 | 26 | 14 | 7 |
| My insurer should have access to the information in my EMR | % | 30 | 11 | 19 | 27 | 18 | 26 |

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 2
ATTITUDES TO EMRs - TREND

“An electronic medical record (EMR) is a virtual health history, including illness, medical test results, allergies, prescription medication use, hospitalizations, etc. It can be used by health care providers to help manage medical conditions and avoid medical errors. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about electronic health records?”

Base: All adults

| | 2007* | 2008* | 2009 | 2010 |
|--|--------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| Percent answering “Strongly/Somewhat Agree” | % | % | % | % |
| All physicians treating me should have access to information contained in my EMR | 80 | 83 | 78 | 78 |
| An EMR would be a valuable tool to track the progress of my health | 76 | 81 | 72 | 71 |
| My health records are for my own use and should not be provided to other parties | 53 | 50 | 51 | 53 |
| My insurer should have access to the information in my EMR | 27 | 26 | 33 | 30 |

*2008 and 2007 question asked about “Personal Health Records” (PHR) instead of “Electronic Medical Records” (EMR).

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 3
DOES PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIAN USE ELECTRONIC MEDICAL RECORD FOR YOU?

“To the best of your knowledge, does your primary care physician use electronic medical records for your visits and/or treatment?”

Base: All adults

| | Total | East | Midwest | South | West |
|--|-------|------|---------|-------|------|
| | % | % | % | % | % |
| Have a primary care physician | 89 | 93 | 85 | 89 | 84 |
| He/She uses an EMR | 28 | 27 | 32 | 22 | 35 |
| No, does not use an EMR | 17 | 18 | 16 | 20 | 15 |
| Not sure | 42 | 48 | 37 | 48 | 34 |
| N/A – I do not have a primary care physician | 12 | 7 | 15 | 11 | 16 |

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 4
CONSUMER ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY

“To what extent do you use, or have access to, the following?”

Base: All adults

| | | | I Use it Now | It's Available to Me but I Don't Use it | It is Not Available to Me | Not Sure |
|--|------|---|--------------|---|---------------------------|----------|
| An electronic medical record to capture medical information | 2006 | % | 2 | 3 | 73 | 22 |
| | 2010 | % | 7 | 8 | 49 | 37 |
| Email to communicate directly with my doctor | 2006 | % | 4 | 4 | 73 | 19 |
| | 2010 | % | 9 | 12 | 53 | 27 |
| The ability to schedule a doctor's visit via the Internet | 2006 | % | 3 | 4 | 75 | 18 |
| | 2010 | % | 8 | 11 | 54 | 26 |
| Receiving the results of diagnostic tests via email | 2006 | % | 2 | 3 | 76 | 19 |
| | 2010 | % | 8 | 10 | 52 | 30 |
| A home monitoring device that allows <u>me</u> to send medical information – like blood pressure readings or blood tests – to the doctor's office via the telephone or email | 2006 | % | 2 | 3 | 76 | 19 |
| | 2010 | % | 3 | 8 | 61 | 28 |
| Reminders via email from my doctors when you are due for a visit or some type of medical care | 2006 | % | 4 | 3 | 74 | 19 |
| | 2010 | % | 11 | 10 | 62 | 27 |

Methodology

This survey was conducted online within the United States June 8 to 10, 2010 among 2,035 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey

weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words “margin of error” as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

Full data available at www.harrisinteractive.com

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These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

About HealthDay

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About Harris Interactive

Harris Interactive is one of the world's leading custom market research firms, leveraging research, technology, and business acumen to transform relevant insight into actionable foresight. Known widely for the Harris Poll and for pioneering innovative research methodologies, Harris offers expertise in a wide range of industries including health care, technology, public affairs, energy, telecommunications, financial services, insurance, media, retail, restaurant, and consumer package goods. Serving clients in more than 215 countries and territories through our North American, European, and Asian offices and a network of independent market research firms, Harris specializes in delivering research solutions that help us - and our clients - stay ahead of what's next. For more information, please visit www.harrisinteractive.com.