



June 19, 2008

Landmark Survey Finds Low Rates of Physician EHR Adoption



New research published Wednesday in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that fewer than 20% of U.S. physicians use some form of electronic health records, the ***New York Times*** reports.

Experts say the study, funded by HHS and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, is more definitive than previous research because it is based on a larger sampling and a detailed survey.

Fifty-one percent of physicians in practices of 50 or more doctors said they use EHRs, while fewer than 9% of physicians in small practices reported using EHRs.

Physicians surveyed cited cost as the primary barrier to EHR adoption (Lohr, *New York Times*, 6/19). The study's authors estimate that the cost of transitioning from paper records to EHRs is about \$60,000 (Davis, ***USA Today***, 6/19).

In addition, 54% of physicians without EHRs said that finding an EHR system that met their needs was a "major barrier" to adoption. Doctors also cited the time-consuming transition to EHRs as a barrier (*New York Times*, 6/19).

Findings

The survey of 2,758 physicians nationwide found that:

- 42% said their office had purchased an EHR system but had not yet deployed it or were planning to purchase one in the next two years;
- 13% said they had a basic or partially functional EHR system; and
- 4% said they had a fully functional EHR system (Ferris, ***Government Health IT***, 6/18).

Of the surveyed physicians who use EHRs, the survey found:

- 86% said the systems helped to avoid medication errors;
- 85% said they improved the delivery of preventive care;
- 82% said using EHRs improved the quality of clinical decisions (*New York Times*, 6/19); and
- About 60% of physicians who use more basic EHR systems responded positively to them (Alesci, ***Bloomberg News***, 6/19).

The survey also found that physicians who treat more affluent patients were just as likely to adopt EHRs as those who treat low-income patients, although the study's co-author, David Blumenthal, said more research is necessary to ensure there is not a disparity (*USA Today*, 6/19).

The researchers who oversaw the survey recommended that policy leaders look for guidance from other countries whose cost-sharing strategies have boosted EHR adoption into the 90% range.

The survey was conducted between September 2007 and March 2008 (Conn, ***Modern Healthcare***, 6/18). Karen Bell, director of HHS' Office of Health IT Adoption, said CDC will repeat the survey using the same survey instrument in the future (*Government Health IT*, 6/19).

Reaction

Catherine DesRoches of Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston and the lead author of the study, said, "Clearly the results show we are a long way from universal adoption by 2014." President Bush has set a goal for most U.S. residents to have EHRs by 2014 (Steenhuysen, ***Reuters***, 6/18).

Bell said she is "heartened" by the growing response among physicians to adopt EHR systems, noting, however, that the study shows "we are a long way from universal adoption" (*USA Today*, 6/19).

Blumenthal, director of the Institute of Health Policy at Massachusetts General Hospital, said, "We need to get moving a lot faster than we have been if we are going to take full advantage of this technology and realize its promise for

medicine" (*Government Health IT*, 6/18).

David Brailer, former National Coordinator for Health IT, called the findings "very encouraging" but noted that doctors are unsatisfied with existing EHR products. He said, "What we see is a deficit in innovation, and that is something innovators and the capital market can address" (*New York Times*, 6/19).

© 1998-2008. All Rights Reserved. iHealthBeat is published daily for
The California HealthCare Foundation by **The Advisory Board Company**.