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WSJ ONLINE/HARRIS INTERACTIVE HEALTH-CARE POLL

Benefits of Electronic Health Records Seen as Outweighing Privacy Risks

 By **BECKEY BRIGHT**

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A sizable majority of Americans believe electronic medical records have the potential to improve U.S. health care and that the benefits outweigh privacy risks, according to a new Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive poll.

The survey of 2,153 U.S. adults, conducted Nov. 12-14, shows three-quarters of respondents agree that patients could receive better care if doctors and researchers were able to share information more easily via electronic systems and 63% agree sharing of such records could decrease medical errors. Fifty-five percent agree this could reduce health-care costs, compared with 15% who disagree. However, about one-quarter of adults remain unsure whether electronic medical records can provide these benefits.

About one-fourth of respondents say they currently use some form of electronic medical record; most say the record is kept by their physician, while only 2% say they have created and maintain their own record and another 17% said they aren't sure whether they have such a record. Still, 91% of those polled say patients should have access to their own electronic records maintained by their physician.

WSJ HEALTH BLOG


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 Do the benefits of electronic medical records outweigh the privacy risk? If so, what can be done to get more doctors to go electronic? Join the discussion on the Health Blog².


Among those who have an electronic medical record, half say they are very confident that their physicians and other health-care providers have a complete and accurate picture of their medical history, compared with 27% of those who don't have electronic records.

Better use of technology to improve the U.S. health-care system isn't a new idea, but the issue is likely to become part of the health-care debate during the 2008 presidential campaign. In a speech laying out his plans, [Sen. John McCain suggested](#)³ Web technology could have helped Hurricane Katrina victims get medical help. And in an editorial earlier this month, Sen. John Kerry and former House Speaker Newt Gingrich urged the use of [using e-prescriptions](#)⁴, rather than paper ones, to reduce medication errors. Microsoft recently announced plans to launch a consumer Web site to store and share health information.

But the use of electronic medical records has hit roadblocks over privacy concerns and doctors' resistance to the potential time and financial costs of transferring paper records online. And the latest poll indicates these privacy concerns remain: half of those surveyed say the use of electronic medical records makes it more difficult to ensure patients' privacy, down from 61% in a 2006 poll, while 25% disagree and another quarter say they aren't sure. But nearly two-thirds of respondents say the benefits of electronic medical records outweigh the privacy risks, compared with 40% who think they don't.

See full results of the poll:

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"How confident are you that when you go to see a doctor/health care professional, he or she always has an accurate and complete picture of your prior medical history?"

Base: All Adults

	Total	Use Electronic Medical Record	
		Yes	No
Very/Somewhat Confident (NET)	76%	89%	71%
Very confident	33	50	27
Somewhat confident	43	39	45
Not At All/Not Very Confident (NET)	20	11	24
Not very confident	14	9	16
Not at all confident	6	2	7
Not sure	4	*	5

"Some people use or have access to an electronic medical record to capture and store personal medical information. Which statement best describes the type of electronic medical record that you use?"

Base: All Adults

	Total
Use an Electronic Medical Record (NET)	26%
My doctor maintains an electronic record of my medical history in his or her office.	23
I have created and maintain my own personal medical record on my computer.	2
I use a personal health record that is stored on the Internet.	1
I use something else to maintain my electronic medical record.	1
Not sure	17
I do not use an electronic medical record.	56

"How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?"

Base: All adults

		Agree Strongly/Somewhat (Net)	Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly/Somewhat (Net)	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly	Not Sure
The use of electronic	2006	57%	21%	36%	21%	15%	6%	22%

medical records can significantly decrease the frequency of medical errors.	2007	63	25	38	12	9	4	24
The use of electronic medical records can significantly reduce health-care costs.	2006	62	27	35	15	11	5	23
	2007	55	18	37	15	9	5	30
The use of electronic medical records makes it more difficult to ensure patients' privacy.	2006	61	25	36	25	17	7	14
	2007	51	20	30	25	18	6	25
The use of electronic medical records can improve the quality of care patients receive by reducing the number of redundant or unnecessary tests and procedures they receive.	2006	70	32	38	13	9	4	17
	2007	67	29	38	8	6	3	24
If doctors and researchers were able to share information more easily via electronic medical systems, patients	2007	74	37	37	6	4	2	21

could receive better care that is based on the best available scientific knowledge.								
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"Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?"

Base: All Adults

	Total	Use Electronic Medical Record	
		Yes	No
Patients should have access to their own electronic medical record maintained by their physician.			
Agree	91%	96%	89%
Disagree	9	4	11
Medical offices should provide patients with the ability to schedule appointments via email or on the Internet.			
Agree	77	82	75
Disagree	23	18	25
Patients should be able to email their doctors as part of their overall care, with no additional charge.			
Agree	75	80	73
Disagree	25	20	27
The benefits of electronic medical records outweigh the privacy risks.			
Agree	60	72	56
Disagree	40	28	44
Doctors should be compensated for time spent emailing patients.			
Agree	43	51	40
Disagree	57	49	60

Methodology: This poll was conducted online in the U.S. between Nov. 12 and 14, 2007, among a cross section of 2,153 adults. Figures for age, sex, race, education and number of adults in the household were weighted where necessary to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online. In theory, with probability samples of this size, one could say with 95% certainty the results have a statistical precision of plus or minus three percentage points of what they would be if the entire adult population had been polled with complete accuracy.

About Harris Interactive

Harris Interactive is a world-wide market research and consulting firm, best known for The Harris Poll and its use of the Internet to conduct scientifically accurate market research. For more information, see www.harrisinteractive.com⁵. To become a participant in The Harris Poll Online and join future online surveys, see www.harrispollonline.com⁶.

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