

Doctors experienced with using EHRs say they add value for patients

January 3 2014, by Sharyn Alden, Hbns Contributing Writer

A new study in Health Services Research finds nearly three-quarters of physicians using electronic health records (EHRs) in 2011 said there were clinical benefits when patients' medical histories were kept in digital files. The study focused on doctors' perceptions of clinical benefits to patient care when EHRs were in place.

Jennifer King, Ph.D., chief of research and evaluation at the Office of the National Coordinator (ONC) for Health Information Technology and lead author of the study, explained that physicians with longer experience using EHRs were more likely to report clinical benefits.

Researchers looked at the responses from 3,180 physicians to the Physician Workflow Survey questionnaire about their experiences with EHRs. "A majority of physicians said they were alerted to a potential medication error or critical lab value and about one-third reported that EHRs helped them identify needed lab tests or facilitated direct communication with patients," said King.

The study's findings may open up new opportunities for more doctors to gain health IT benefits. King said Stage 2 of the Meaningful Use program, which provides incentives from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services for EHRs, includes policies designed to enhance the use of EHRs to exchange data between providers and give patients access to their health records.

"These policies may increase the rate at which physicians are able to use

their EHRs to realize benefits such as not ordering duplicate lab tests and identifying needed tests," said King.

Mickey McGlynn, chair of the Electronic Health Record Association and senior director of strategy and operations for Siemens Healthcare said, "The study reinforces our view that meaningful use of EHR technologies can deliver clinical benefits and improve outcomes."

McGlynn pointed out that the majority of care delivery in the U.S. is provided in office settings with ten or fewer physicians and these environments have fewer resources to support health IT. "Because of that, they have historically been late adopters of EHRs. Successful EHR adoption requires provider organization to integrate technology into their workflows and to adjust workflows over time to support their practices and specialties."

McGlynn added that the study may help those reluctant to invest in EHR technology to realize that benefits may not be achieved quickly but can be over time. "EHR adoption is a journey not a destination. All stakeholders must collaborate to ensure that requirements to achieve both benefits and incentives are practical and do not add unnecessary burdens to busy providers who must make [patient care](#) their top priority."

Provided by Health Behavior News Service

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