

Few Physicians Have Full EHRs, but Many Plan to

BY MARY ELLEN SCHNEIDER
New York Bureau

About 17% of U.S. physicians have electronic health records in their offices, although only 4% of all doctors have comprehensive systems, according to results from a survey of more than 2,700 physicians nationwide.

However, more physicians are planning to purchase or implement the technology soon. For example, of the 83% of physicians without an EHR, 16% told the survey that their practice had purchased a system that had yet to be implemented and 26% said that their practice was planning to purchase an EHR system in the next 2 years (N. Engl. J. Med. 2008;359:50-60).

"If these intentions are realized, we could see a good-sized increase in the number of physicians with an EHR over the next 3 to 5 years," Catherine DesRoches, Ph.D., the lead author of the study, said during a press briefing on the survey results. Dr. DesRoches is an assistant in health policy at the Institute for Health Policy at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston.

The nationally representative survey was conducted between September 2007 and March 2008 by researchers at the Massachusetts General Hospital, Cornell University, and George Washington University. The study was funded by the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology, part of

the Health and Human Services department, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Some of the researchers reported receiving grant support from GE Healthcare, which markets EHRs.

The Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology commissioned the survey to provide a definitive national estimate of EHR adoption by physicians in the United States. Previous estimates of adoption range from 9% to 29%, but most of the estimates are based on small sample sizes or incomplete definitions of an EHR, according to the researchers.

The researchers randomly selected 4,484 eligible physicians from the American Medical Association's 2007 Physician Masterfile, of which 2,758 completed the survey. The survey found that 4% of physicians have a fully functional EHR. The researchers defined a fully functional EHR as one that includes the ability to write and send orders electronically, the ability to view lab results and images, and the ability to provide clinical decision support and reminders. In addition, about 13% of physicians reported having a basic EHR, which has electronic prescribing but lacks clinical decision support and certain order entry capabilities.

Physicians were more likely to report having a fully functional system if it was integrated with their hospital system, the survey found. For example, 71% of physi-

cians who reported a fully functional EHR said that their system was integrated with their affiliated hospital system, compared with 56% among those physicians with a basic EHR system.

Adoption continues to be influenced by the size and setting of a practice. For example, the survey showed that adoption was more likely among physicians who practiced in large groups (at least 50 physicians) than among those who practiced in groups of 3 physicians or fewer.

Most physicians who have adopted EHRs reported satisfaction with the system and positive effects on quality of care and communication. About 93% of physicians who have implemented fully functional EHRs reported being satisfied with their systems, along with 88% of physicians with basic systems.

Cost continues to slow adoption, the researchers found. Capital costs were cited as barriers by 66% of physicians without an EHR. Other barriers noted by physicians without an EHR include finding a system that meets their needs (54%), concerns about the return on investment (50%), and worries that the system will become obsolete (44%).

But adoption could be improved by helping physicians to purchase EHRs through loans or direct payments, and by offering additional payment for the use of a system, according to the survey. "We're not surprised by that, given their worries

about the cost of the system," Dr. DesRoches said. Physicians are also seeking legal protection from personal liability if the record is tampered with by an outside party.

"This suggests that we might be able to significantly increase the rate of adoption by easing the financial burden on office-based providers. I think this is particularly true for providers in smaller one- and two-physician practices," she said.

These types of incentives will be critical to increasing adoption, said Dr. Richard J. Baron, an internist in a five-physician community-based practice in Philadelphia that implemented an EHR in July 2004. While the use of the EHR has changed his practice for the better, Dr. Baron said the process of implementing the system was both disruptive and costly.

Not only did the practice spend more than \$40,000 per physician to purchase their EHR system but they are also spending \$60,000 annually for technical support. In the current reimbursement system, a primary care physician is much more likely to get a return on investment with the purchase of a new scanner than for adopting an EHR, he said.

It would be helpful to find a mechanism to aggregate funding from the stakeholders who benefit financially when physicians adopt EHRs, Dr. Baron said.

"I really think new financing strategies are desperately needed," he commented. ■

CLASSIFIEDS

www.obgynnews.com

PRACTICE FOR SALE

CUMBERLAND, MARYLAND

Assume a "turn key" solo OB/GYN practice! Gorgeous, four season mountain community near large recreational lake. New hospital to open Fall 2009. **Hospital Package.** Phone 301-759-2900

BILINGUAL OB PRACTICE- NEW ENGLAND

Pristine location. Rated Top 5 in the US, schools Top 10. Associate with retiring MD that does GYN only. No money down. Potential: NET>600K/yr.
E-mail: practicervl@yahoo.com

Stuttering and Your Child: questions and answers

For a 64-page book, send \$1.00 for postage and handling to:

1-800-992-9392



Box 11749 • Memphis, TN 38111-0749

PROFESSIONAL OPPORTUNITIES



OBSTETRICS AND GYNECOLOGY

Geisinger Health System seeks three BC/BE Obstetrics and Gynecology generalists to join its growing, multi-disciplinary team. Positions are available at Geisinger Northeast, Wilkes-Barre, PA, and Geisinger Medical Group – State College, PA.

About Geisinger Women's Health Service Line:

- It is a network of primary care obstetricians/gynecologists, located in 24 offices throughout Geisinger's 40-county service area
- Physicians are electronically connected to sub-specialists in maternal fetal medicine, gynecology/oncology, and urogynecology throughout the system

For more information, please contact Peggy Graf, Physician Recruiter, at 1-800-845-7112, email: psgraf@geisinger.edu or visit www.geisinger.org/docjobs

GEISINGER REDEFINING THE BOUNDARIES OF MEDICINE.



WE BELIEVE in getting more out of life.

When you join the Mid-Atlantic Permanente Medical Group (MAPMG), you'll be able to get more out of your life and your career. As a physician-owned and managed multi-specialty group, we know firsthand what it takes to advance professionally and thrive personally.

That's why we provide a comprehensive network of support services and a work and call schedule that's designed to help you make the most of your time...both at work and at home.

OB/GYN PHYSICIANS

Fredericksburg & Woodbridge, VA and Maryland

We're looking for 2 OB/GYNs to join our new Fredericksburg location opening in January. This is your chance to work in a smaller setting and help us grow our membership. Opportunities also available at our Woodbridge, VA and Maryland locations.

Operating under the Kaiser Permanente umbrella, MAPMG is a family of over 800 physicians who proudly serve more than 500,000 health plan members. We offer our physicians a strong referral based practice, no office management/insurance hassles, an excellent call schedule and manageable office hours.

To apply, visit our website at: <http://physiciancareers.kp.org> and select Mid-Atlantic. Contact Melissa Steele at (301) 816-6597 or Melissa.M.Steele@kp.org.

KAISER PERMANENTE **thrive**
Mid-Atlantic Permanente Medical Group

E0E

Also available at www.elsevierhealthcareers.com