

Electronic Health Records Don't Slow Care Down

BY SHERRY BOSCHERT
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SAN FRANCISCO — Adopting an electronic health records system reduced the mean length of visits at five outpatient clinics by 4 minutes per patient, a difference that was not statistically significant but that should allay physicians' fears that the technology might be a burden, Lisa Pizziferri said.

The results come from a time-motion study in which observers shadowed primary care physicians before and after implementation of the electronic health records (EHR) system, she said at the triennial congress of the International Medical Informatics Association.

They studied 20 doctors before EHR implementation, 16 of those after adoption of the system, and 4 physicians recruited

after EHR implementation, for a total of 20 physicians before and after the change.

Direct patient care took about 14 minutes in the pre-EHR era and 13 minutes using EHR, said Ms. Pizziferri of Partners HealthCare System Inc., Wellesley, Mass.

Indirect patient care—reading, writing, or other tasks in support of direct patient care—took 9 minutes before EHR and 10 minutes after. Physicians spent about half a minute reviewing schedules before EHR and 1 minute with EHR. Time spent eating,

walking, or performing other miscellaneous tasks decreased from 4 minutes to 3 minutes per patient after EHR implementation.

The mean overall time spent with each patient decreased by 4 minutes, and was calculated independently, not by adding up the times of individual tasks, she said. During an average 4-hour observation period per physician, physicians saw 9 patients while using paper records and 10 patients while using EHR.

Asked to rate their experiences on a five-

point scale (with five being the best), physicians rated the EHRs impact on quality, access, and communication a four, Ms. Pizziferri said. Impact on workload was 3 and overall satisfaction, 4.

Partners HealthCare designed the Web-based EHR system, called the Longitudinal Medical Record. It includes clinical data, computerized decision support, reminders for health maintenance, and tools for charting, order entry, and management of results or referrals. ■

INDEX OF ADVERTISERS

Adams Laboratories, Inc.	
Mucinex	53
Biosite	
Triage BNP Test	21
Endo Pharmaceuticals Inc.	
Lidoderm	
Forest Laboratories, Inc.	
Namenda	13-17
Camptral	39-42
Lexapro	50a-50b
Combunox	62a-62b
Fujisawa Healthcare, Inc.	
Adenoscan	65-66
Hoffman-La Roche Inc.	
Corporate	37
King Pharmaceuticals, Inc.	
Sonata	26a-26b
LifeScan, Inc.	
OneTouch	77
Eli Lilly and Company	
Cymbalta	60-62
McNeil Nutritionals, LLC	
Splenda	25
MedImmune, Inc.	
FluMist	28-30
Merck & Co., Inc.	
Vytorin	19-20
Fosamax	22a-22d, 23
Zetia	70a-70b
Zocor	82a-82b
Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation	
Diovan	91-92
Novo Nordisk, Inc.	
NovoLog	42a-42b
Organon Pharmaceuticals USA, Inc./ Ligand Pharmaceuticals	
Avinza	10a-10b
Ortho-McNeil Pharmaceutical, Inc.	
Topamax	55-59
Levaquin	66a-66b
PBM Pharmaceuticals, Inc.	
Animi-3	79-80
Pfizer Inc.	
Lipitor	3-4
Zolof	33-34
Caduet	45-49
Purdue Pharma L.P.	
OxyContin	35-36
Sankyo Pharma Inc.	
WelChol	30a-30b
Santarus, Inc.	
Zegerid	6a-6d
Sepracor Inc.	
Lunesta	69
Wyeth Pharmaceuticals Inc.	
Effexor XR	8-10
PREMPRO	72-74

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