

Group Practices Continue to Use Paper Records

BY MARY ELLEN SCHNEIDER
Senior Writer

Most group practices are still using paper medical records, according to preliminary results from a survey by the Medical Group Management Association.

"Paper is still the dominant mode of data collection," William F. Jessee, M.D., president and CEO of the Medical Group Management Association (MGMA) said in a webcast sponsored by the group.

But the scale is tipping, he said. About 20% of group practices report that they have an electronic health record of some kind. Another 8% have a dictation/transcription system for physician notes, combined with a document imaging management system for information received on paper.

"We're seeing a steady movement toward a paperless office," Dr. Jessee said.

The preliminary findings are based on responses from about 1,000 group practices that responded to an electronic ques-

tionnaire. The second stage of the survey will include mailing more than 16,000 printed questionnaires to a sample of group practices across the country.

The survey is part of a contract from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality to MGMA's Center for Research and the University of Minnesota. The purpose is to provide a baseline measure of the use of information technologies in medical groups.

Challenges in transitioning to an electronic health record include knowing which

product to buy, how to go about buying it, and how to implement the system, said David Brailer, M.D., national health information technology coordinator for the Department of Health and Human Services.

"Many groups stumble at every point along the way," Dr. Brailer said.

The private industry is working to create a voluntary certification process for electronic health record products.

The American Health Information Management Association, the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society, and the National Alliance for Health Information Technology have formed a nonprofit group—the Certification Commission for Healthcare Information Technology—that is planning to pilot a first-step certification process this summer.

HHS has already asked the industry for comments on how to design a mechanism that would allow physicians and other health care providers to share information across the health care system.

The agency is now reviewing the more than 500 responses on how to address the legal, economic, privacy, and technical concerns involved in creating an interoperable system, Dr. Brailer said. ■

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