Trends in the use of electronic medical records

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A comparison between the results of the 2007 and the 2010 National Physician Survey (NPS) shows that exclusive use of electronic medical records (EMRs) by family physicians, general physicians, and other specialists across Canada has increased from 10% to 16%. The province of Alberta leads the way with 28% of physicians exclusively using EMRs, followed by Ontario (20%) and British Columbia (19%) (Figure 1).

Some physicians in all provinces use a combination of EMRs and paper charts. The combined use of EMRs and paper charts by physicians increased from 26% to 34% over 3 years (Figure 2). The most recent 2010 data showed that 39% of physicians used electronic records to enter and retrieve clinical patient notes, 20% used electronic reminders for recommended patient care, and 20% used electronic warnings for adverse prescribing and drug interactions.

The trends are encouraging because the adoption of health technology systems enhances physicians’ perceptions of preparation for managing patients with chronic diseases, increases their ability to document and follow up on adverse events, and improves the implementation of clinical practice guidelines.1 Data from the 2006 Commonwealth Fund International Health Policy Survey of Primary Care Physicians showed that Canada lagged behind in the use of EMRs compared with other countries.1 For example, 23% of primary care physicians used EMRs in Canada compared with 89% in the United Kingdom and 28% in the United States.2 This was owing, in part, to concerns regarding cost, security, privacy, workload, design, and technology.3 However, a recent Ontario survey suggests physicians are gaining confidence in EMR use for improving the quality of patient care and practice management.4 The continued substantial investment in health technology systems for primary care practices promises increased use of EMRs in Canada in the future.

The NPS is a collaborative project of the College of Family Physicians of Canada, the Canadian Medical Association, and the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. Additional results are available at www.nationalphysiciansurvey.ca. If you would like the opportunity to develop a future Fast Fact using the NPS results, please contact Artem Safarov, National Physician Survey Project Manager, at 800 387-6197, extension 242, or asafarov@cfpc.ca.

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References

EMR—electronic medical record.

*Family physicians, GPs, and other specialists were combined into a single group owing to small sample size. Where there are no values, data were suppressed owing to small sample size.

Figure 1. Proportion of physicians for whom EMRs are the exclusive record-keeping system, by province

Figure 2. Proportion of physicians who use a combination of paper charts and EMRs, by province