

Four benefits of electronic health records

Leaders from industry, academia, and health care discuss the rollout of this technology at The Atlantic's sixth annual Health Care Forum

By Jamie Elizabeth Rosen, Editor, Real World Health Care | March 27, 2014

Today [The Atlantic Health Care Forum](#) brought together leading policymakers and industry experts in medicine, public health, and nutrition to have conversations about the state of the nation's health care system. The event was sponsored by Siemens, Surescripts, WellPoint, GSK and PhRMA. *Real World Health Care* attended to share insights from the panel "Health Care Tomorrow: Examining the Tools and Technologies that Will Revolutionize the Future Health Care System."

Much of the discussion centered around electronic health records, which are increasingly being rolled out in huge hospital systems after the federal government incentivized their adoption to the tune of billions of dollars five years ago. Four themes emerged from the panel, which included top executives from Johns Hopkins Medicine, athenahealth, PhRMA, and Carolinas HealthCare System.



Jamie Rosen

1. Enhancing collaboration.

Electronic health records facilitate a team-based approach to hospital care, as well as allowing for better coordination between hospital systems. "What we're going to see is it's going to drive team-based clinical care because everyone in the system will have access to the same medical records," said Dr. Paul Rothman, Dean of the Medical Faculty and Vice President for Medicine at [The Johns Hopkins University](#) and Chief Executive Officer at [Johns Hopkins Medicine](#). "You're going to see an [increased] level of collaboration not only between delivery systems, but also between the patient and the health care provider."

However, Ed Park, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, [athenahealth](#), warned that the decades-old technologies that many hospital systems are using are

limited in their capabilities. “The current crop of [electronic health records] are documentation tools instead of care management tools,” he said, adding that they are primarily for use by insurers and lawyers. “What I fear is health systems beginning to buy their way into their own prisons that are built of their own IT...as opposed to dealing in an open environment,” he said.

2. Enabling patient-centered care.

Electronic health records enable patients to reap greater benefits from telehealth. “Having your information on your iPhone: that’s not far away,” Dr. Rothman said. “[Patients are] going to do EKG’s at home. They’re going to be measuring their blood sugar at home. The patient will have control of the data.”

Electronic records also hold the promise of helping to solve age-old problems in the U.S. health care system, including keeping contact with patients to encourage them to take prescribed treatment regimens. “There is almost \$350 billion a year in inefficiency because of lack of compliance and adherence with medications,” said John Castellani, President and Chief Executive Officer, [PhRMA](#). “If you could just get an improvement in whether patients take the medicines that are prescribed, you could capture this great savings.”

“You have kids who have kidney transplants, and you can give them reminders on Facebook that they have to take their medications,” Dr. Rothman added.

3. Targeting therapies for increased success.

Electronic medical records can help health care providers ensure that they prescribe the treatments most likely to work for their patients.

“What I think is the promise of electronic medical records is our ability to find subsets of diseases through the broad diseases we treat,” Dr. Rothman said. “Asthma isn’t one disease. Obesity isn’t one disease. Diabetes isn’t one disease. We are going to be able to find subsets of diseases and target therapies [that work]. That’s when you’re going to see efficiency and return on investment.”

4. Harnessing the power of big data.

Our health care system has already begun to see the benefits of 'big data' with examples such as the discovery of drug side effects and interactions through [mining consumer web search data](#). "We have to use the technologies to bring down the cost of the drug discovery process," Castellani said.

"Just taking care of the patient, we capture data," said Dr. Roger Ray, Executive Vice President and Chief Medical Officer, [Carolinas HealthCare System](#). "That allows us to know when a patient...may be at risk for hospital readmission. Having the ability to mine [data]...makes a difference for patients.

"We all, each of us, remember with longing a simpler time when we could scribble and walk off and our job was done," he added. "What we know now is that's not very good for the patient. We had no standardization allowing us to help patients avoid lots of different bad outcomes they could have."

Have electronic medical records impacted your health or that of your patients? Share your thoughts in the comments section.

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