

How Many Physicians Have Adopted Electronic Health Records in Nebraska? An Update on the Nebraska Medical Association Project

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Introduction

The adoption of electronic health records (EHRs) is regarded as a key patient safety and health care quality improvement in medical practice. Adoption of the use of EHRs has taken on increased importance with the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology encouraging universal implementation by 2014. National research has estimated that between 17 and 25% of physician practices are currently utilizing EHRs and EHR implementation differs considerably when taking into account size of practice.¹ Smaller practices (five or fewer physicians) have an EMR use of 12%, while 19% of practices with more than 10 physicians report EMR use. A recent state survey in Massachusetts found that practices with greater numbers of physicians were more likely to have EHRs already implemented.² Use of EHRs was also more pronounced in hospital-based practices, or those practices involved in medical resident teaching.^{1,3} Although a small percentage of physicians currently possess fully implemented EHRs, it is estimated that about 90% of group practices utilized computer-based billing systems and patient scheduling systems.¹

This rate of adoption is considered slow by the health information technology community and is attributed to a multitude of implementation barriers. Among those barriers most cited are concerns with start-up as well as ongoing financial costs, loss of productivity, and lack of technical skills and support.¹⁻³ At what stage of EHR adoption are physician practices at in Nebraska?

Research Design and Data Collection Methods

A recent cross-sectional survey was distributed to all licensed physicians in the state of Nebraska in February through May of 2007 to identify the stage of EHR adoption of active ambulatory physician office-based practices.⁴ Those who have active licenses but do not practice in Nebraska, are retired, or who no longer maintain an active license were excluded. The state of Nebraska Licensure database serves as the primary record source to identify physicians. Data was supplemented from the Health Professions Tracking Center (HPTC) and Nebraska Medical Association membership databases for missing data elements related to practice areas and office-based information.^{5,6,7}

Results

There were 1274 respondents for a final response rate is 47.8%. Of these, 11% of physicians have no plans to adopt EHR, 32% are still evaluating the need for EHR in their practice, 16% are currently selecting an EHR system to implement, 17% are in the process of implementing EHR, and 23% of physicians have fully implemented EHRs in their practice.

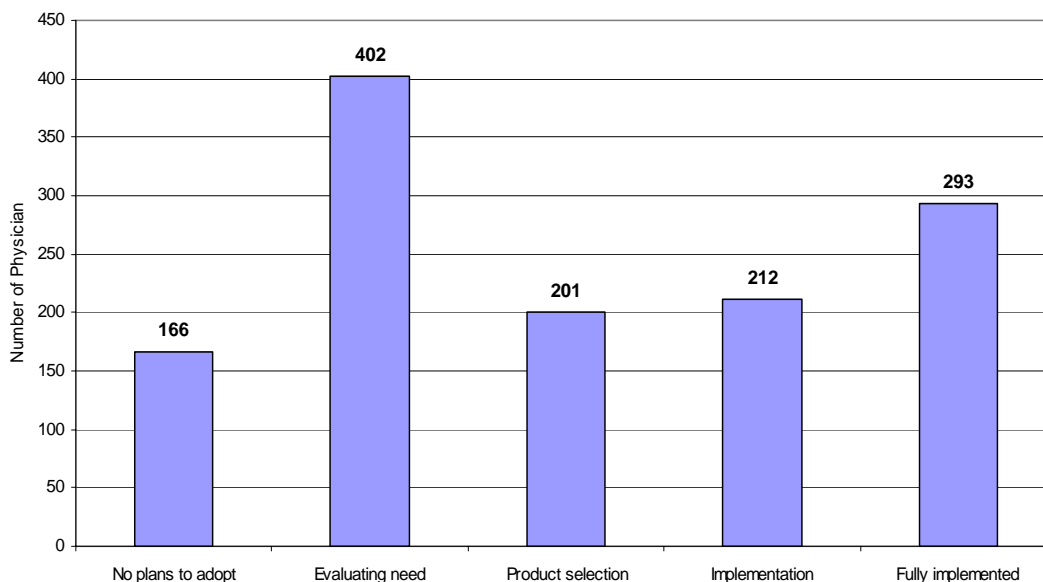
This distribution is compared to national findings indicating that 42% of physicians did not plan to implement EHRs within a 2 year period (September 2005), 35% did plan to adopt it in the next 2 years, 13% are in the process of implementing EHRs, and 12% have fully implemented EHRs.

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EHRNebraska
Distribution of physician practices in the process of adopting electronic medical records.



Discussion

The proportion of physicians that have implemented EHRs is comparable to the national rate. A substantial portion of Nebraska physicians appear to be somewhat conservative about the decision to implement EHRs in the future, with 43% either having no plans to implement or evaluating the need. This is similar to that observed in the 2005 national data.

The Nebraska Medical Association will facilitate the process of working with physician practices across the state for preparation of integrating EHRs through the project, “Enhancing Clinical Practices through the Adoption of Health Information Technology in Nebraska”. This project stresses the need for a “systems” approach to workflow and business processes. The overall goal of this project is to facilitate the adoption of EHRs by Nebraska physicians to improve patient safety as well as to enhance quality and efficiency within the healthcare system. As a part of this project, a series of regional town meetings is being scheduled to reach every practice in the state, including frontier areas. We are also conducting a comprehensive survey of physician practices to understand the progress and needs of physicians. This survey is just being launched and a comprehensive report will be distributed to physicians and other key stakeholders upon completion. Please plan on attending a town hall in your area.

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