

Most health care records now are electronic

July 17 2013, by David Jackson, Usa Today

An ever-expanding amount of the nation's medical records—millions of prescriptions, medical reports and appointment reminders—are now computerized and part of an ambitious electronic medical records program, the Obama administration reports.

Since the start of a 2011 program in which the government helps finance new [health records](#) systems, doctors or their assistants have filled more than 190 million prescriptions electronically, according to data provided by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

Providers have also shared more than 4.3 million health care summaries with colleagues when patients change doctors, according to the data.

More than half of the nation's health care providers and more than 80% of hospitals now have electronic records.

"It has real-world implications for real-life patients," said Farzad Mostashari, a physician and national coordinator for health information technology with the Department of Health and Human Services.

The goals of electronic [medical records](#) include better and faster exchanges of information between doctors who share a patient, reducing duplication of tests and procedures, eliminating errors on prescriptions, and providing patients with quicker access to their own records.

The data also says that health care providers have delivered:

—More than 4.6 million electronic copies of health information to patients;

—More than 13 million reminders about appointments, required tests, or check-ups;

—More than 40 million checks on drug and medication interactions.

To date, the Obama administration has provided \$15.5 billion to nearly 310,000 health care providers that have moved to "EHR," the government's term for electronic health records. The program was part of the 2009 stimulus bill.

The law also includes financial penalties for Medicare providers that do not move to electronic records, starting in 2015.

The transition to [electronic medical records](#) has not always been a smooth one.

Margret Amatayakul, a health information systems consultant in the Chicago area, said some providers have had a hard time deciding what kind of computer system might work best for them. She said installing and learning how to use new electronic systems take time, and some providers have had to use "a trial and error" approach.

"Overall, it's been a good thing," she said. "But we have to look at the lessons we're learning."

Mostashari said switching to electronic records is "a big change," and health care officials are willing to work with providers by supplying data and other forms of assistance.

"I can tell you one thing," Mostashari said. "Once they make the change,

they'll never go back to paper."

A June report from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services said that 4,024 hospitals—80.3% of those eligible—have adopted an EHR system.

So have more than 305,000 health care professionals, 55.3% of the total.

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