

Privacy concerns decline about digital health records

October 7 2015, by Anne Machalinski

Patients whose doctors use electronic health record systems are increasingly confident that their health information will remain private and secure, Weill Cornell Medicine researchers found in a new longitudinal study, published Oct. 5 in the *American Journal of Managed Care*.

While electronic health record systems have been around since the early 2000s, they became more prevalent when the federal government began offering providers incentives to adopt the technology in 2009. To measure consumers' perspectives on electronic [health records](#), the researchers collected data through a random-digit-dial national telephone survey that polled about 1,000 people a year between 2011 and 2013. Forty-one percent of respondents were worried that [electronic health records](#) would lessen the privacy and security of [personal health data](#) in 2013, compared to 47.5 percent in 2011.

"Electronic health records, which were adopted really quickly and are now used in more than 96 percent of doctor's offices, have made a huge difference in the way that [medical care](#) is delivered. This study shows us that patients have noticed this change and have become more comfortable with the technology," said lead investigator Jessica Ancker, associate professor of [healthcare policy](#) and research at Weill Cornell Medicine.

While the 6 percent decrease is a good start, Ancker continued, the study also demonstrates that, through improved security and education, more

work has to be done to address patients' worries. "New things make people anxious," she said.

The data also show that there is a need to better educate patients about how electronic records work, as well as how they can improve the patients' healthcare. Depending on the year, between 15 and 21 percent of those surveyed didn't know whether or not their doctor was using [electronic medical records](#). And the investigators noticed a slight decrease in the number of people believing that electronic records would improve medical care – 61.5 percent in 2013, down from 64 percent in 2011. These findings underscore the need to educate patients on how the technology can give them easy access to their [health information](#), which might help them better manage their own care.

"This work is so important because it looks at the public's views of [electronic health records](#) immediately after a federal-level policy change led to a huge increase in their use," said senior investigator Dr. Rainu Kaushal, chair of the Department of Healthcare Policy and Research and the Frances and John L. Loeb Professor of Medical Informatics at Weill Cornell Medicine. "This study not only focuses on the patient, but also tracks their perceptions over time. The results show that while people have become more comfortable with this technology, there's still more work to be done."

Provided by Cornell University

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