

Patient care can improve with technology in nursing homes

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A significant part of the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act was the \$25 billion invested in health information technology (IT) to improve quality, safety, efficiency in health care while also reducing health disparities. However, nursing homes did not receive the same level of investment in technology as hospitals, leading to little understanding of how IT sophistication is impacting patient care in nursing homes. Now, research from the University of Missouri shows increases in IT sophistication can lead to potential improvements in health care quality measures.

"Approximately 16,000 [nursing homes](#) exist in the United States, and more than one million older Americans depend on nursing homes for their care," said Greg Alexander, professor in the Sinclair School of Nursing. "Yet despite the significant role nursing homes play in [health care](#), nursing homes do not receive the same financial incentives to upgrade their IT systems as hospitals."

To understand the relationship between IT sophistication and [quality measures](#) in health care, Alexander and his team, Richard Madsen, a statistician with the medical research office in the MU School of Medicine and project staff Erin Miller and Keely Wise, are assessing national trends in IT adoption every year over a three-year period using an IT Sophistication Survey. The assessment provides scores based on IT capabilities, extent of IT use and IT integration, and how they are used in resident care, clinical support and administrative activities.

"The scores indicated that technology is becoming a greater part of resident care in areas where physicians and nurses work, not just in areas of administration and billing," Alexander said. "We found that as IT sophistication increases in resident care, there appears to be a positive impact on quality measures. This finding means that if nursing home staff have access to the right technological tools and are using them to facilitate resident care, quality of care can and should improve."

Alexander recently received a Fulbright U.S. Scholar program grant to Australia from the U.S. Department of State and the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board. The grant will be used to study

informatics in nursing homes. He will be researching IT sophistication and quality measures in nursing homes at Macquarie University as part of a project to improve [patient care](#) in Australia's nursing homes.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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