

Researchers say e-health must be a priority

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An electronic health record system should be the backbone of health care reform in Canada and more must be done to speed up the implementation of this initiative across the country. Furthermore, for this system to be put in place effectively, doctors and front line health care workers and administrators must be encouraged to play a more active role. These are the findings of an innovative new study assessing the effectiveness Canada Health Infoway's e-health plan. The study, which was conducted by scientists at the Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC) and McGill University, was published today in *CMAJ (Canadian Medical Association Journal)*.

"For all levels of care, but particularly primary care, which is where most care is provided in western countries, Canada and US have the lowest adoption of e-health records," says Dr. Robyn Tamblyn, lead author of the study and a medical scientist at the Research Institute of the MUHC.

"We have some urgent issues to address to ensure that improved management of chronic disease and timely access to care is enabled through e-health technologies."

The Canada Health Infoway project was implemented by the federal government in 2001 with the goal of accelerating e-health implementation and creating a national system of interoperable [electronic health records](#). After 10 years and \$1.6 billion of investment in 280 health information technology projects, Canada still lags behind countries such as Denmark, the UK, and New Zealand.

"We need an e-health policy that aligns the spending in health information technology with our priorities in the health care system," says Dr. Tamblyn, who is also a professor in the Departments of Medicine and Epidemiology, Biostatistics, and Occupational Health at McGill University. "We also need to address privacy issues and support clinical leadership."

The researchers interviewed key stakeholders from national and provincial organizations in Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario, who are responsible for policy and leadership in health information technology. The objective was to look at both the successes and lessons learned in order to define needs and facilitate the adoption of e-health records in Canada.

The results showed that Canada Health Infoway has met with some success in setting up standards and developing a plan for provinces to compare notes and share resources, but that more work needs to be done to improve and speed-up the implementation of health information technologies to support challenges in delivering the best care for all Canadians. "Canada needs to drive this initiative from the clinical grass roots level to regional integration," says Dr. Tamblyn. "The potential of this project could represent a significant return on investment."

More information: The study entitled "A qualitative study of Canada's experience with the implementation of electronic health information technology" was made possible by grants from The Commonwealth Fund and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

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