

Doctors who go digital provide higher quality healthcare

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The use of electronic health records is linked to significantly higher quality care, according to a new study by Lisa Kern and her team, from the Health Information Technology Evaluation Collaborative in the US. Their work appears online in the *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, published by Springer.

[Electronic health records](#) (EHRs) have become a priority in the US, with federal incentives for 'meaningful' use of EHRs. Meaningful use entails tracking and improving specific patient outcomes, as well as gathering and storing information.

Kern and colleagues examined the effect of EHRs on ambulatory care quality in a community-based setting, by comparing the performance of physicians using either EHRs or paper records. They assessed performance on nine specific quality measures for a total of 466 [primary care physicians](#) with 74,618 patients, from private practices in the Hudson Valley region of New York.

The quality measures included: eye exams, hemoglobin testing, cholesterol testing, renal function testing for patients with diabetes, colorectal cancer screening, chlamydia screening, breast cancer screening, testing for children with sore throat, and treatment for children with upper respiratory infections.

Approximately half of the physicians studied used EHRs, while the others used paper records. Overall, physicians using EHRs provided

higher rates of needed care than physicians using paper, and for four measures in particular: hemoglobin testing in diabetes, [breast cancer screening](#), chlamydia screening, and colorectal cancer screening.

The authors conclude: "We found that EHR use is associated with higher quality ambulatory care in a multi-payer community with concerted efforts to support EHR implementation. In contrast to several recent national and statewide studies, which found no effect of EHR use, this study's finding is consistent with national efforts to promote meaningful use of EHRs."

More information: Kern LM et al (2012). Electronic health records and ambulatory quality of care. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*; DOI [10.1007/s11606-012-2237-8](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-012-2237-8)

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