

Health Care Poll

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HEALTH CARE RESEARCH

The Harris Poll® PEOPLE

Many Nationwide Believe in the Potential Benefits of Electronic Medical Records and are Interested in Online Communications with Physicians

Many U.S. adults who are online recognize the value that information technology can bring to healthcare, but they are also aware of some of its challenges. While majorities of online adults believe that electronic medical records have the potential to improve the quality and cost effectiveness of healthcare, an equally large percentage is concerned about potential privacy issues associated with the use of these records. Large majorities also continue to be interested in online communications with their physicians; however, many are not willing to pay for this service.

These are some of the results of a Harris Interactive online survey of 2,638 U.S. adults who are online conducted between February 17 and 21, 2005 for The Wall Street Journal Online's Health Industry Edition.

Majorities believe that electronic medical records can benefit the healthcare system by improving the quality of care, lowering costs and reducing medical errors. Approximately three-quarters of online adults believe that the use of these records can improve the quality of care patients receive by reducing the number of redundant or unnecessary tests and procedures they receive (76%) and that they can significantly reduce healthcare costs (73%). A lower percentage, albeit still a majority, believe that the use of electronic medical records can significantly decrease the frequency of medical errors (62%).

While many see the potential benefits of using this technology, two-thirds (67%) of online adults are also concerned that their use might make it more difficult to ensure patients' privacy.

Interest in Online Communications with Physicians

Interest in online communications with physicians has remained high since 2002 when Harris Interactive first asked the public about their interest in this type of communication. Large majorities of online adults are interested in communicating online with their physician(s) in several different capacities including:

- Asking questions where no visit is necessary (80%);
- Fixing appointments (69%);
- Receiving results of medical tests (69%); and
- Getting new prescriptions for medications they take (67%).

The advancement of online patient-physician communications is faced with a significant challenge. Despite high levels of interest, only one-third (36%) of online adults are willing to pay something to send and receive emails to and from their doctor(s) instead of having to visit or call them; and this is virtually unchanged from 2002. An additional 44 percent say they are not willing to pay for online communications with their physician and one-fifth (21%) are not sure.

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TABLE 1

Consumer Interest In Online Communications With Physicians

“If you could do so, which of the following would you like to be able to do online with your doctor or doctors?”

Base: All adults who are online

	2002*	2005
	%	%
Ask questions where no visit is necessary	77	80
Fix appointments	71	69
Get new prescriptions for medications you take	71	67
Receive results of medical tests	70	69
None of these	6	6
Don't know	4	2

Note: Multiple-response question.

* 2002 results are from the April 10, 2002 edition of Harris Interactive *Health Care News* (Vol. 2, Issue 8), http://www.harrisinteractive.com/news/newsletters/healthnews/HI_HealthCareNews2002Vol2_Iss08.pdf

TABLE 2

Willingness To Pay For Online Communications With Physicians

“Many doctors are reluctant to give patients their email addresses because they feel they may have a lot of email correspondence for which they will not get paid. Would you be willing to pay something for the ability to send and receive emails to and from your doctor(s) instead of having to visit or call them?”

Base: All adults who are online

	2002*	2005
	%	%
Yes, would be willing to pay something	37	36
No	39	44
Don't know	24	21

* 2002 results are from the April 10, 2002 edition of Harris Interactive *Health Care News* (Vol. 2, Issue 8), http://www.harrisinteractive.com/news/newsletters/healthnews/HI_HealthCareNews2002Vol2_Iss08.pdf

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TABLE 3

Attitudes Toward Electronic Medical Records

“How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?”

Base: All adults who are online

	Agree Strongly/ Somewhat (NET)	Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly/ Somewhat (NET)	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly	Not Sure
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
The use of electronic medical records can significantly decrease the frequency of medical errors.	62	21	41	26	20	6	12
The use of electronic medical records can significantly reduce healthcare costs.	73	32	41	14	10	4	13
The use of electronic medical records makes it more difficult to ensure patients' privacy.	67	27	40	24	19	6	9
The use of electronic medical records can improve the quality of care patients receive by reducing the number of redundant or unnecessary tests and procedures they receive.	76	34	42	13	9	5	11

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Downloadable PDFs of Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Polls are posted at http://www.harrisinteractive.com/news/newsletters_wsj.asp.

Methodology

This poll was conducted online in the United States between February 17 and 21, 2005 among a nationwide cross section of 2,638 adults aged 18 and over who are online. Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, income and region were weighted where necessary to align with population proportions.

In theory, with probability samples of this size, one could say with 95 percent certainty that the results have a sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points of what they would be if the entire U.S. adult population who are online had been polled with complete accuracy. Unfortunately, there are several other possible sources of error in polls or surveys that are probably more serious than theoretical calculations of sampling error. This includes refusals to be interviewed (nonresponse), question wording and question order, and weighting. It is impossible to quantify the errors that may result from these factors. This online sample was not a probability sample.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

About the Survey

The Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Poll is an exclusive poll that is published in the award-winning Health Industry Edition of The Wall Street Journal Online at www.wsj.com/health.

About The Wall Street Journal Online

The Wall Street Journal Online at WSJ.com, published by Dow Jones & Company (NYSE: DJ; www.dowjones.com), offers authoritative analysis, breaking news and commentary from top industry journalists. Launched in 1996, the Online Journal is the largest paid subscription news site on the Web, with more than 689,000 subscribers world-wide. The Online Journal provides in-depth business news and financial information 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with insight and analysis, including breaking business and technology news and analysis from around the world. It draws on the Dow Jones network of more than 1,500 reporters and editors — the largest staff of business and financial journalists in the world. For the second consecutive year in 2003, the Online Journal received a WebAward for the “Best Newspaper Web Site” and was also cited by Yahoo! Internet Life magazine as the “Best Business News” site (2002 & 2001).

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