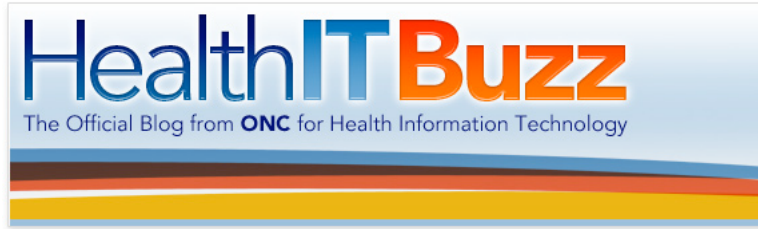


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HITECH in High Gear

Tuesday, February 15th, 2011 | Posted by: [Dr. David Blumenthal](#) | Category: [HHS](#), [Health IT Innovation](#)

We've known for years that health information technology can improve health care. But until recently, the implementation rate among providers has been low, except for a few early adopters.

In the last two years, however, there has been a significant upward inflection in the adoption rate. For primary care providers, adoption of a basic EHR increased by half from 19.8 percent in 2008 to 29.6 percent in 2010.

And with HITECH Act programs now in full swing, it looks clear that adoption and use of health information technology will go into [high gear](#). Already, 81 percent of hospitals and 41 percent of office physicians are saying they intend to achieve meaningful use of EHRs and qualify for Medicare and Medicaid incentive payments.

A recent edition of the [American Journal of Managed Care](#) (AJMC) helps us understand why the accelerated move to EHRs is so important. This [special issue](#) devoted to health information technology presents perspectives on health IT from a wide range of stakeholders—providers, [policymakers](#), and patients. Contributors include representatives of [private companies](#) and [public agencies](#), managed care organizations and [academic medical centers](#), [medical educators](#) and a [medical student](#)—confirmation that the potential of health IT is compelling for a broad spectrum of Americans.

On January 20, I had the pleasure of gathering with some of the editors and contributors for this special issue at the [National Press Club](#). Their insights and stories paint an inspiring picture of the future of health care, [made possible by health IT](#).

The presentations didn't focus on hardware and software, but on improving health outcomes and increasing quality of care. That's because health IT is not about technology itself. It's about the daily work of [patient care](#) and making [health care better for all](#). It's about empowering providers to carry out their mission of delivering quality care to their patients.

How can health IT help accomplish these goals?

In health care, as in so many industries, information plays a vital role. From diagnosis and treatment of an individual, to the allocation of health organization resources, and even real-time response to public health needs, decisions are guided by the available information. With health IT, decision makers on all levels have access to improved and more [actionable](#) information. That information makes possible the evidence-based, collaborative care that benefits patients.

Effective patient care takes more than a good doctor—it takes coordination and a critical mass of data. Health IT provides the [infrastructure](#) to support those goals at a new level.

Diabetes care is a good example, as illustrated by [one of the articles in the issue](#). Effective interventions to prevent and treat diabetes include not only quality medical care, but also lifestyle modifications, such as diet and exercise changes. This multidisciplinary approach involves not only clinicians and health systems, but also patients, employers, and community organizations. And health IT can help at each step of the way.

Health IT helps identify patients early through risk factor analysis and it helps connect patients with qualified clinicians and nearby exercise and nutrition programs. Health IT also makes it possible to share information over secure networks and provide the statistical basis for both clinical efficacy and cost effectiveness. As the authors point out, this collaborative model supported by health IT can be used to improve outcomes for many other health conditions, including cancer and heart disease.

That's where the HITECH Act can take this country. The innovations and insights in the AJMC special issue show us we're on the way to better health care for all.

What signs do you see that health IT is making a difference in the quality of care? Please let us know

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about your experiences in the comments section below. As more and more health care providers take the leap, sharing experiences (challenges and successes alike) will become even more valuable.

For video footage from the AJMC-sponsored event at the National Press Club on January 20, 2011, visit <http://www.ajmc.com/hit-feature>.

Tags: [EHR](#), [health IT](#), [HITECH](#)

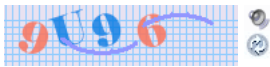
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