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Study: Patients Using EMRs More Loyal, Satisfied with Healthcare Provider

New study identifies behaviors and perceptions of electronic medical record (EMRs) users

Chicago, IL (August 5, 2013) – An estimated 24 percent of Americans surveyed are currently using electronic medical records (EMRs) to check their test results, order prescription refills and make appointments. Yet another 52 percent say they are interested in using EMRs but currently are not accessing these systems, for a variety of reasons. With almost 50 percent of patients taking EMR access into consideration when choosing a healthcare provider, the effective use of EMRs by providers is critical, according to a national consumer study by independent research firm Aeffect and 88 Brand Partners.

As the 2015 government deadline for physicians to adopt certified EMR systems approaches, nearly 75 percent of consumers indicate that they are already using (23%) or interested in using (52%) electronic medical records. Those patients who have used EMRs are significantly more satisfied with their doctors overall (78% versus 68%). They also express higher satisfaction across multiple specific dimensions of care, such as ease of access to information and clarity and thoroughness of communication, according to the *EMR Patient Impact Study*. Furthermore, while those who do use EMRs feel a stronger loyalty to their doctors, they also believe they receive better quality care (82%). EMR users believe they engage in clearer and more responsive communications with their physicians, and can gain access to information easier than non EMR users.

This study comes at a time when, thanks in part to monetary incentives from the federal government, many health systems have already made the leap to EMR systems. EMR use by physicians has risen from nearly 26 percent in 2010 to more than 38 percent in 2012. The increase among hospitals has been even more dramatic – from 15 percent in 2010 to 44 percent in 2012. ⁱ

Despite these incentives, many providers hesitate to embrace EMRs due to additional expenses related to implementing the technology. Results from the *EMR Patient Impact Study* offer support to move ahead, revealing a link between patients' use of EMRs and their perceptions of loyalty and satisfaction toward their physician – a connection undocumented until now.

“The study findings clearly indicate a strong link between EMR users and their confidence in the quality of healthcare they receive,” says Tamara O’Shaughnessy, Vice President, Aeffect. “There is solid evidence that the investment providers continue to make in EMR systems is likely to put adopters at a competitive advantage and yield dividends beyond the expected operational efficiencies—namely it will enhance patient loyalty and satisfaction,” she added.

Additionally, the *EMR Patient Impact Study* has identified four segments of EMR users, ranging from the disinterested, non-user, to the regular user.

Stages of EMR adoption

- Stage 1 – *Disinterested Non-Users* (18%) believe EMRs are no more accurate than paper files; say they don't need their medical information outside of their doctors' offices; most concerned about security of online activities, whether it be EMRs, banking, shopping, etc.
- Stage 2 – *Interested Non-Users* (52%) tend to be less satisfied with their physician than any other type of user; though more than half say their doctors use EMRs, they're not sure how to use it or get started; most influenced by physicians encouragement of using EMRs; most interested in coordination of care and information sharing through technology.
- Stage 3 – *Trial Users* (9%) have the highest share of women and non-white consumers than any other group; perceptions are similar to Stage 4 users, but one-third have just recently started using EMRs within the last six months.
- Stage 4 – *Regular Users* (13%) prefer emailing their doctor instead of calling or meeting in-person; one in three are caregivers to an adult family member, such as parents; 67 percent say online access would be very influential in their choice of a new doctor; most system-loyal user group (80% would stay within the same system).

Caregivers accessing EMRs

Among those who regularly use EMRs are primary caregivers to adult family members. The *EMR Patient Impact Study* reveals that one in three caregivers (33%) have used an EMR, either on the web or via a mobile device compared to 21 percent of non-caregivers. Caregivers are using EMRs to provide assistance with medical appointments, or making medical decisions for their loved one. According to the National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP, 29 percent of adults provide care to someone who is ill, disabled or aged. EMRs will be pivotal in managing healthcare as the population continues to age.

"The study provides healthcare providers with valuable insight into not only who is using EMR but why they are adopting the technology," says Michael McGuire, Director of Strategy, 88 Brand Partners. "The business of health care is dependent upon meeting patients' expectations. EMR users are telling us that they are more confident in the coordination of care they're being provided, and think more highly of their doctors, simply because of the information technology in use," he added.

Other EPI Study Highlights

- Consumers who prefer their doctor to use an electronic chart cited numerous reasons including: access to medical records (40%); accuracy/better record keeping (18%); and coordination of care and information sharing (e.g. in case of emergency) (17%).
- EMR utilization is higher among consumers who are younger, live in the Western part of the United States, have higher levels of education, and provide care to an adult family member. An estimated 34 percent of residents of Western states report having tried an EMR.
- Twenty-three percent of those surveyed have no idea what type of medical records their health care provider maintains.

- Consumers do not believe that paper charts are more secure than EMRs (28% agree). However, nearly 40 percent (39%) believe that electronic medical records are more accurate than paper charts.
- Those who have used an EMR are most likely to say they were influenced to try one by a recommendation from their physician (40%). Receiving a letter or other communication from their provider is also influential (25%).
- The study revealed that despite the many EMR capabilities, the technology is not being fully utilized by EMR users —particularly tracking immunizations or screenings and completing paperwork prior to appointments. Reasons for lack of utilization of these services may be that patients are not aware of or do not know how to use these EMR tools, or that their provider's EMR system does not offer them.

Methodology

Aeffect and 88 Brand Partners conducted a nationwide online survey in December 2012. The survey consisted of 40 questions on topics related to use of electronic medical records (EMRs). A total of n=1000 surveys were completed, providing a maximum margin of error of +/-3% at the 95% confidence level for the total sample. To qualify for participation, respondents had to fall within the 25 to 55 age range and were required to have some type of health insurance, have seen a physician within the past three years, and have a regular doctor. For a full copy of the report, visit www.emrpatientimpact.com.

About

Aeffect, Inc. is a research and consulting firm with more than 20 years of experience helping health systems, government agencies, major medical centers, and other health entities gather and leverage actionable insights into strategic marketing and business decisions. Their dedicated expertise in understanding consumers' attitudes and opinions about their healthcare has helped organizations across the nation build loyalty and achieve stellar reputations. Visit: www.aeffect.com.

88 Brand Partners is a strategic communications and creative agency with more than 20 years of experience across the spectrum of healthcare industries --- including health systems, hospitals, wellness centers and professional associations. Through its collaborative and integrated approach to insights, brand creation and campaign development, 88 has helped its healthcare clients build powerful brands around the true value they deliver to their audiences. Visit: www.88brandpartners.com.

ⁱ "[Health Information Technology in the United States: Better Information Systems for Better Care, 2013](#)", Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Harvard School of Public Health and Mathematica Policy Research.