

Accenture: Health records result in reduced medical error

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Singapore: According to a survey by Accenture, majority of Australian doctors (77 percent) have highlighted that sharing health records electronically had a positive impact on reducing medical errors in 2012, according to a survey by Accenture.

The survey of 3,700 doctors in eight countries, including Australia, Canada, England, France, Germany, Singapore, Spain and the US, also found that 83 percent of Australian doctors are actively using electronic medical records (EMR) and roughly 70 percent reported improved quality of diagnostic and treatment decisions as a result of their use of shared electronic health records.

Accenture's survey revealed that most Australian doctors (83 percent) want patients to actively participate in their own healthcare by updating their electronic health records (EHR). However, the majority believe that patients should only have limited access to this record, a view shared across the surveyed countries. There was broad agreement among Australian doctors that patients should be able to update standard information in their health records, including demographics (87 percent) and family medical history (78 percent).

However, a significant proportion of doctors were opposed to patients providing updates in areas such as medications (29 percent), medication side effects (28 percent), allergic episodes (26 percent) and lab test results (59 percent). The level of opposition to such patient input was notably higher than most other countries.

"Australian doctors are increasingly embracing electronic medical records to improve the quality of care provided and clinical outcomes," said Mr Leigh Donoghue, managing director of Accenture's health business in Australia and New Zealand. "This

is in line with the most advanced healthcare systems. However, there is clearly more to be done in terms of enabling consumers to play an active role in their own care. This requires a shift in the way clinicians think and interact with patients, harnessing new technologies such as electronic health records and mobile devices. From the survey, this seems to be happening faster in other countries."

Less than a quarter of doctors (18 percent) believe that a patient should have full access to his or her own record, 65 percent believe patients should have limited access and 16 percent say they should have no access. Australia ranked second highest of the eight countries surveyed in the proportion of doctors that say patients should have no access to their record.

"The shift to patient-centered care has long been talked about, but we're now entering a new stage with the rise of the digital citizen and availability of electronic health records. The combination of smartphones, faster broadband, mobile access to the PCEHR system, and a growing array of mobile health applications will trigger fresh demands from consumers for more active participation in managing their own care. To meet changing consumer expectations, Australian doctor's views on patient access will need to evolve."

"It's difficult to predict how quickly this shift will happen or where it will lead, but it looks unlikely to happen in a way that doctors and administrators have fully anticipated or feel comfortable with," Mr Donoghue added.

Underlining the growing importance of electronic health records, there has been a 62 per cent increase since 2011 in the number of Australian doctors who said they routinely access electronic clinical data about patients previously seen by a different health organisation.

The increase in the use of electronic health record systems among Australian doctors was second only to the increased usage by doctors in Germany, who reported a 77 percent increase. Australian doctors have also increased their routine use of other IT capabilities, including: receiving patients' clinical results electronically (67 percent), entering patient notes during or after consultations (64 percent) and receiving electronic alerts/reminders while seeing patients (44 percent).

Surprisingly, only five percent of doctors in Australia routinely communicate electronically with patients. However Australian doctors expect accessibility to patient clinical records to increase to 76 percent over the next two years, which is in line with their global counterparts.