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Few Patients Use or Have Access to Online Services for Communicating with their Doctors, but Most Would Like To

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Over half of all adults say a doctor's use and investment in health info technology would influence their choice of doctor a great deal or to some extent

The latest Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Poll reveals that the medical profession is lagging behind other service sectors and professions in its use of Internet-based solutions to communicate with and manage customer information—in this case, patients and their medical information. Patients would like to see medicine move in this direction, and most adults say that they would like to have access to electronic medical records and other electronic means of communicating and transferring medical information. If given a choice between a doctor who provides such services and one who does not, more than half of all adults believe this would influence their choice of doctors. In the future, physician practices that choose to invest in and use health information technology could find themselves at an advantage.

These are some of the results of an online survey of 2,624 U.S. adults, ages 18 and older, conducted by Harris Interactive between September 5 and 7, 2006 for The Wall Street Journal Online (www.wsj.com/health).

Though very few adults currently use or have access to the following technologies when seeking care from a doctor or hospital, majorities would like to have access to them:

- A large majority of adults (77%) would like reminders via email from their doctors when they are due for a visit or some type of medical care (4% currently use this technology, and another 3% have it available to them, but do not use).
- Three-quarters of adults (75%) say they would like to have the ability to schedule a doctor's visit via the Internet (3% currently use and 4% have it available to them, but do not use).
- Many adults (74%) would like to use email to communicate directly with their doctor (4% currently use and 4% have it available to them, but do not use).
- Approximately two-thirds of adults (67%) would like to receive the results of diagnostic tests via email (2% currently use and 3% have it available to them, but do not use).

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- Sixty-four percent of adults would like to have access to an electronic medical record to capture medical information (2% currently use, and 3% have it available to them, but do not use).
- Over half (57%) of adults say they would like to use a home monitoring device that allows them to send medical information – like blood pressure readings or blood tests – to the doctor's office via the telephone or email (2% currently use, and 3% have it available to them, but do not use).

When it comes to the value of using electronic medical records, most adults who are online agree strongly or somewhat that it would improve the quality and safety of medical care and reduce cost of healthcare. However, most also believe that electronic medical records may present a challenge to ensuring patients' privacy:

- 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 (68%).
- The use of electronic medical records makes it more difficult to ensure patients' privacy (62%).
- The use of electronic medical records can significantly reduce healthcare costs (60%).
- The use of electronic medical records can significantly decrease the frequency of medical errors (55%).

The poll also indicates that the availability of online services could influence to some extent how patients choose health-care providers. If given a choice between a doctor who provides an electronic medical record and one who does not, 54 percent of adults say this would influence their choice of doctors a great deal or to some extent, compared to 34 percent who say that it would not influence their decision. Physicians' use of email to communicate directly with them or a family member would have a greater impact on patients' decisions, with 62 percent saying that it influence their choice a great deal or to some extent, compared to 29 percent who say that it would not influence their decision. are slightly more likely (62%) to say a physician's use of email to communicate directly with them or a family member would influence their choice a great deal or to some extent.

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TABLE 1

Consumer Interest in Technology When Seeking Medical Care

“Which of the following technologies would you like to have access to when seeking care from a doctor or hospital?”

Base: All adults

		Yes, Would Like	No, Would Not Like	Not Sure
An electronic medical record to capture medical information	%	64	18	19
Email to communicate directly with my doctor	%	74	14	13
The ability to schedule a doctor’s visit via the Internet	%	75	14	11
Receiving the results of diagnostic tests via email	%	67	22	11
A home monitoring device that allows me to send medical information – like blood pressure readings or blood tests – to the doctor’s office via the telephone or email	%	57	21	22
Reminders via email from my doctors when you are due for a visit or some type of medical care	%	77	13	9

Note: Percentages may not add up to exactly 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 2

TABLE 2

Consumer Access to Technology

“To what extent do you use, or have access to, the following?”

		I Use it Now	It’s Available to Me but I Don’t Use it	It is Not Available to Me	Not Sure
An electronic medical record to capture medical information	%	2	3	73	22
Email to communicate directly with my doctor	%	4	4	73	19
The ability to schedule a doctor’s visit via the Internet	%	3	4	75	18
Receiving the results of diagnostic tests via email	%	2	3	76	19
A home monitoring device that allows me to send medical information – like blood pressure readings or blood tests – to the doctor’s office via the telephone or email	%	2	3	76	19
Reminders via email from my doctors when you are due for a visit or some type of medical care	%	4	3	74	19

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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/Some-what (Net)	Agree Strongly	Agree Some-what	Disagree Strongly/Some-what (Net)	Disagree Some-what	Disagree Strongly	Not Sure
The use of electronic medical records can significantly decrease the frequency of medical errors.	2006	%	55	20	35	21	15	6	24
The use of electronic medical records can significantly reduce healthcare costs.	2006	%	60	25	34	16	11	5	25
The use of electronic medical records makes it more difficult to ensure patients' privacy.	2006	%	62	24	38	23	17	6	15
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.	2006	%	68	30	38	12	8	3	20

Note: Percentages may not add up to exactly 100% due to rounding.

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TABLE 4

Impact of Technology Access on Physician Choice

“If you could choose between two doctors, but only one used the following types of information technology in his or her practice, how much would this influence your choice of doctors?”

Base: All adults

		A Great Deal/To Some Extent (Net)	A Great Deal	To Some Extent	Not Much/Not at All (Net)	Not Much	Not at All	Not Sure
An electronic medical record to capture medical information	%	54	18	36	34	17	17	12
Email to communicate directly with me or a family member	%	62	23	38	29	15	14	9

Note: Percentages may not add up to exactly 100% due to rounding.

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

Methodology

Harris Interactive conducted this online survey within the United States between September 5 and 7, 2006 among a national cross section of 2,624 adults, ages 18 years and over. Figures for age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, income and region were weighted where necessary to align with population proportions. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

(Note: For Table 3, with a base of all adults online, figures for age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, income, region and amount of time spent online each week were weighted where necessary to align with population proportions.)

All surveys are subject to several sources of error. These include: sampling error (because only a sample of a population is interviewed); measurement error due to question wording and/or question order, deliberately or unintentionally inaccurate responses, nonresponse (including refusals), interviewer effects (when live interviewers are used) and weighting.

With one exception (sampling error) the magnitude of the errors that result cannot be estimated. There is, therefore, no way to calculate a finite “margin of error” for any survey and the use of these words should be avoided.

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With pure probability samples, with 100 percent response rates, it is possible to calculate the probability that the sampling error (but not other sources of error) is not greater than some number. With pure probability samples of 2,624, one could say with a ninety-five percent probability that the results have a sampling error of +/- 3 percentage points. However that does not take other sources of error into account. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

About The Wall Street Journal Online

The Wall Street Journal Online at WSJ.com, published by Dow Jones & Company (NYSE: DJ; www.dowjones.com), is the largest paid subscription news site on the Web. Launched in 1996, the Online Journal continues to attract quality subscribers that are at the top of their industries, with 766,000 subscribers world-wide as of Q2, 2006.

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 nearly 1,900 business and financial news staff—the largest network of business and financial journalists in the world. The Online Journal also features exclusive content, including interactive graphics on business and world news, and online-only columns about the automotive industry, technology, personal finance and more.

The Online Journal offers three industry-specific verticals: the award-winning Health, Media & Marketing and now Law. Health offers authoritative analysis, breaking news and commentary from top industry journalists. Media & Marketing is designed for professionals in the advertising, marketing, entertainment and media industries. Law is designed to provide law firms and attorneys timely information on events and trends important to the legal market. Subscribers to all also get access to the full content of the Online Journal.

In 2005, the Online Journal was awarded a Codie Award for Best Online News Service for the second consecutive year, and its Health Industry Edition was awarded Best Online Science or Technology Service for the third consecutive year. In 2004, the Online Journal received an EPpy Award for Best Internet Business Service over 1 million monthly visitors. The Wall Street Journal Online network includes CareerJournal.com, OpinionJournal.com, StartupJournal.com, RealEstateJournal.com and CollegeJournal.com.



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About Harris Interactive

Harris Interactive is the 12th largest and fastest-growing market research firm in the world. The company provides research-driven insights and strategic advice to help its clients make more confident decisions which lead to measurable and enduring improvements in performance. Harris Interactive is widely known for *The Harris Poll*, one of the longest running, independent opinion polls and for pioneering online market research methods. The company has built what could conceivably be the world's largest panel of survey respondents, the Harris Poll Online. Harris Interactive serves clients worldwide through its United States, Europe and Asia offices, its wholly-owned subsidiary Novatris in France and through a global network of independent market research firms. The service bureau, HISB, provides its market research industry clients with mixed-mode data collection, panel development services as well as syndicated and tracking research consultation. More information about Harris Interactive may be obtained at www.harrisinteractive.com.

To become a member of the Harris Poll Online, visit <http://go.hpolsurveys.com/Health>.

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