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President Obama signed the economic stimulus bill one year ago. What's your opinion of the \$787 billion program?

- It's a needed economic boost.
- It's a boondoggle.
- It's somewhere in between.

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Dream of something more than fighting your way into middle management

Posted date: 2/22/2010

Medical Offices Get Up to Speed on Digitizing Paper Records

TECHNOLOGY: Feds Offer Financial Incentives To Make the Conversion

By EMMET PIERCE

Encouraged by a federal incentive program, hospitals throughout the San Diego region are updating electronic medical records systems to reduce the potential for errors and cut their administrative costs.

Officials say the government's contribution won't cover all costs associated with fully converting from paper to computerized records.

The real benefit will come with improved efficiencies and the higher level of patient care that comes with electronic systems, said William Spooner, senior vice president and chief information officer of Sharp HealthCare in San Diego.

"Our goal is to have all of the medical records digitized so we have eliminated manual processing of medical records," Spooner said. "We will have the data organized in a way that we are making optimal health care decisions based on the information we have in our databases. We are more than halfway there."

In the United States, about 38 percent of office-based physicians reported using fully or partially electronic medical records systems in 2008, according to the National Center for Health Statistics.

Electronic medical records, or EMRs, have been around for decades, said Ed Daniels, a health care technology consultant based in Denver. Recently, the Obama administration supported financial incentives, motivating hospitals to increase EMR sophistication. In the end, everyone will win, Daniels stressed.

Advantages Of Electronic Records

Handwritten records are associated with poor legibility, which may contribute to medical mistakes. In contrast, electronic records are continuously updated. Specific medical decisions can be quickly checked against medical practices normally prescribed under similar circumstances. This reduces the chance of error.

"The more efficient you are, the more automated you are, the more you use computers to double-check and not make mistakes, the better off

everyone will be," Daniels said.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 earmarked some \$19 billion to improve electronic health records. A medium-sized community hospital with a typical Medicare population could receive \$5 million from the federal government under the incentive program for EMR systems, said Spooner. An individual doctor might be eligible for up to \$44,000 if he or she had a large volume of Medicare patients, he added.

The use of electronic records "is a complete change in the way we view information," said Dr. Ben Kanter, chief medical information officer at Palomar Pomerado Health. "It is no longer segregated into encounters."

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February 22-28, 2010



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High-flying, unmanned spy planes have the media's attention. Impressive as those aircraft might be, however, they are nothing without the specialized instruments that grab images to be transmitted back to the United States.

Telehealth Network to Virtually Link Remote, Metro Caregivers Statewide

A few years from now, hospitals and clinics serving patients in remote areas of San Diego County will be able to connect with major medical centers across the state.

Encore Capitalizing On Consumers' Credit Card Woes

The recent trend in more consumers paying off their debt and getting their financial houses in order worries the folks at San Diego-based Encore Capital Group Inc., a collector of charged-off credit card debt.

Stimulus Bill Helps Spur Demand for SBA Loans

While many banks are hunkering down, dealing with more problem loans, and being more careful about lending, lenders providing loans guaranteed by the U.S. Small Business Administration are seeing increased activity.

WEEKLY EDITION

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