

## Special Audio Report Transcript

Headline: Government Incentives Fueling Growth in Physician Use of Electronic Prescribing Tools

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### Text:

A recent survey on electronic prescribing found that 58% of doctors nationwide now use an e-prescribing system. That's up sharply from the year before, when 36% used the technology. Experts say government incentives are helping to accelerate the trend, and the next step is encouraging prescribers to use all the functions of e-prescribing systems. This is a special report for *iHealthBeat*, a daily news service of the California HealthCare Foundation. I'm Rachel Dornhelm.

For an example of how e-prescribing recently took off, look no farther than Jimmy Yuen.

***(Yuen): "This is a queue where we look up all the requests that we send to doctors..."***

Yuen, the owner and pharmacist at Advance Medical Pharmacy in Walnut Creek, California, is pointing out the features of his computer system's e-prescribing function. Yuen says he first turned it on about four years ago.

***(Yuen): "But at first we didn't like it, we used it maybe six months, we were receiving a lot of wrong prescriptions from doctors all over the place, patients that were not ours."***

He suspected prescribers were still learning to use the system and so he turned it off. Then a little over a year ago, doctors started demanding the functionality. He says he turned it back on and had a totally different experience.

***(Yuen): "So e-prescribe is much easier. It saves the pharmacy time compared to if they would phone in a prescription."***

Not to mention typing in the data, says Yuen, or going through faxes. So what drove e-prescribing use to grow from just 4% of U.S. doctors in 2004 to nearly 60% in 2011? Tony Schueth, CEO of Point of Care Partners, says it has to do with government incentives.

***(Schueth): "The biggest drivers right now are MIPPA -- the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act -- which was the first piece of legislation that created both what I call carrots and sticks, so incentives and penalties. And the penalties are about to kick in."***

Schueth says close on its heels came the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which created the meaningful use program. Stage 1 of the meaningful use program requires health care providers to route 40% of their prescriptions electronically. Schueth says unlike past programs, these aren't just about providers buying technology, but about them using it. And he says even though the incentives and penalties aren't large, they work.

Schueth says entities besides the government can also have a big hand in e-prescribing adoption. He worked to get health care providers in the Detroit metro area e-prescribing after the efficiency of the technology came to the attention of General Motors, Ford and Chrysler.

***(Schueth): "And what they've done is they worked together -- even though the entities are competitors in every other arena they work together in the state of Michigan to help doctors, encourage doctors to get electronic prescribing and electronic health records technology and to use it."***

Kate Berry, CEO of the National eHealth Collaborative, says while there is variation among states, overall e-prescribing adoption is growing nationwide. Once you get past 40% adoption, she says, you're past the tipping point and growth will accelerate. She says besides the meaningful use incentives for Medicare and Medicaid providers, new Drug Enforcement Administration rules enabling the electronic prescription of controlled substances will continue to push adoption.

***(Berry): "For people that prescribe lot of pain medication it wasn't worth it for them to e-prescribe ... So that's actually another area where a lot of progress will happen when that becomes commonplace."***

Berry says the National Progress Report on E-Prescribing from Surescripts found that different medical fields adopted the technology at different rates. She says not surprisingly, doctors who prescribe a lot of medication -- like primary care providers and heart specialists -- are at the top of the list.

Surescripts describes itself as the nation's e-prescribing network. David Yakimischak is general manager for e-prescribing there. He says the use of e-prescribing tools is a pretty good leading indicator of the use of electronic health record systems, in part because e-prescribing was one of the earliest and most simple components of EHR technology.

***(Yakimischak): "We actually suffer from this simplicity issue which is a lot of people think that all there is to e-prescribing is sending a new prescription to the pharmacy, and there is so much more to it."***

Yakimischak says the system allows prescribers to check for interactions with other medications the patient is on, check how appropriate a drug is given medical history and look at a patient's drug insurance benefits.

***(Yakimischak): "In many cases, they haven't spent time talking to the patient about is the drug affordable, is it on formulary, is there a copay? ... So we're talking about also changing behavior and workflow, and these things don't all happen overnight."***

Yakimischak says encouraging more advanced use of e-prescribing technology is the next step, now that use at the most basic level is well under way. The government may help with that as well. The next stages of the meaningful use program are expected to further raise the bar on e-prescribing use.

This has been a special report for *iHealthBeat*, a daily news service of the California HealthCare Foundation. If you have feedback or other issues you'd like to have addressed, please email us at [iHB@CHCF.org](mailto:iHB@CHCF.org). I'm Rachel Dornhelm, thanks for listening.