

Special Audio Transcript

Headline: Surveys Recognize Hospitals' IT Adoption, but Concerns About a Digital Divide Continue

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The nation's top hospitals are using health IT to improve patient safety, tighten data security and engage with patients online. But health IT experts are concerned that small and rural hospitals are lagging behind. This is a special report for *iHealthBeat*, a daily news service of the California HealthCare Foundation. I'm Deirdre Kennedy.

The annual "Health Care's Most Wired" survey is a benchmark for hospitals to assess whether they're moving at the same pace, faster or somewhat slower than their peers. This year about one-third of all U.S. hospitals agreed to take part by answering detailed questions on four main areas: infrastructure, business and administrative management, clinical quality and safety and clinical integration. Matthew Weinstock -- senior editor of *Hospitals & Health Networks* -- reviewed the findings.

(Weinstock): "The most wired hospitals are those that have integrated IT adoption into their overall strategic planning, so it's not just IT for IT's sake anymore. It's really how are they going to improve overall operations whether it's financial, clinical."

Of the 1,570 hospitals who chose to submit a survey, 215 hospitals made the list; 25 others were dubbed "Most Improved." Weinstock says some of the most common areas where hospitals fell short were: encryption for laptops, frequency of security reviews; computer provider order entry for medications; or the time they need to restore clinical information systems.

(Weinstock): "Most wired hospitals need to be able to do it within 72 hours of systems going down."

This year, the survey recognized 25 hospitals as "Most Wired -- Small and Rural." The category applies fewer criteria for hospitals that operate under tight budgets with small staff. Chantal Worzala, director of policy for the American Hospital Association, says it's important to showcase what small hospitals can achieve so that others can follow in their footsteps.

(Worzala): "One of the American Hospital Association's concerns is that we ensure that all hospitals are moving along with their EHR"

adoption because we don't want to see a growing digital divide between the large urban teaching hospitals and their small rural community counterparts."

Worzala says there are a number of ways the federal government could help prevent that gap from spreading, including expanding broadband networks in rural areas and revising its policies for IT adoption.

(Worzala): "It's a question of looking at the meaningful use criteria to ensure that they're not written in a way that might disadvantage smaller or rural hospitals. And it's also a question of ensuring that technical assistance resources such as those of the Regional Extension Centers are really reaching out to smaller and rural facilities."

Electronic health record status has become a factor in consumer ratings. The 156 hospitals on the *U.S. News and World Report's* "Most Connected" list not only meet the highest clinical standards, they have also reached Stage 6 or 7 on the HIMSS Analytics EHR adoption Model. Stage 7 means fully integrated EHR. HIMSS Analytics Executive Vice President John Hoyt says some small hospitals have been able to reach those IT goals by using pooled resources.

(Hoyt): "A bunch of small hospitals get together and have one data center serving a lot of small hospitals. Each hospital owns one 20th of a data center. Another model is a vendor who offers to run it [the hospital's IT system] out of its own data center. That model's working, so I have some critical access hospitals who have reached Stage 7."

Kaiser Permanente has nine hospitals on the Most Connected list. Chief Medical Information Officer John Mattison helped deploy an IT system to thousands of doctors in Southern California. He says while outside contractors can be invaluable to smaller hospitals, any new IT system has to be customized to each hospital's specific needs.

(Mattison): "If you're treated like just another cookie in a cookie cutting machine of 'here's how we did it in the last 10 hospitals, and we're just going to do it in the exact same way with you,' if you don't get some recognition of the fact that workflows vary based upon local resources and the size of the hospital, that can be a problem."

This has been a special report for *iHealthBeat*, a daily news service from the California HealthCare Foundation. If you have feedback or other issues you'd like to have addressed, please email us at IHB@chcf.org. I'm Deirdre Kennedy. Thanks for listening.