



C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health

Vol. 9 Issue 5 ■ May 17, 2010

A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics and Communicable Diseases, and the University of Michigan Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Unit

“ePediatrics”: Parents Want More Communication With Their Kids' Doctors

Health care reform legislation includes broad promotion of electronic health records (EHRs), to improve the efficiency and quality of medical care. Much of the focus has been on the cost and challenges of introducing EHRs into clinical settings. Yet, little attention has been paid to understanding how patients use electronic communication—such as email or the internet—to interact efficiently with the health care system. The CS Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked parents about communicating electronically with their children's health care providers.

Parent Interest in Online Services

Less than 10% of parents currently are able to use email or the internet for administrative tasks, such as scheduling an appointment or obtaining an immunization record (Table 1). Less than 15% of parents use email or the internet for clinical actions, such as requesting a prescription refill or getting medical advice (Table 1). About one-half of parents reported that it would be very helpful to be able to accomplish administrative and clinical tasks via e-mail or the internet (Table 1).

Table 1. Current and Future Online Communication with Children's Health Care Providers

	Currently can do	Would be very helpful to do
Electronic Administrative Action		
Schedule an appointment	9%	40%
Obtain child's immunization record	9%	55%
Complete checklist/screening form prior to a well-child visit	6%	46%
Electronic Clinical Action		
Request prescription refill	11%	55%
Get advice regarding a minor illness or injury	14%	47%
Obtain lab results	6%	53%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2010

Data Source

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by Knowledge Networks, Inc, for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital via a method used in many published studies. The survey was administered January 1-18, 2010, to a randomly selected, stratified group of parents aged 18 and older (n= 1,612) with children 0-17 years of age from the Knowledge Networks standing panel that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 71% among parent panel members contacted to participate. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 1 to 4 percentage points.

Report Highlights

- **Less than 15% of parents are currently able to have online or email communication with their children's health care providers.**
- **One-half of parents feel it would be very helpful to have electronic communication with their children's health care providers.**

Implications

Electronic communication between parents and their children's health care providers offers numerous potential benefits. For administrative tasks that almost all parents need to complete, electronic communication can reduce wasted time and minimize frustration for both parents and office staff. For clinical services, parents often have questions about whether minor injuries or illnesses require an office visit; electronic communication provides a way to obtain advice without waiting on hold for long periods of time.

Nevertheless, there are challenges to electronic communication between parents and their children's providers. Health care providers have expressed concerns about medical liability associated with offering clinical advice via email or internet, without examining the patient. Additional provider concerns relate to reimbursement for services provided electronically. Given the strong endorsement for electronic communication from this national sample of parents, significant efforts should be made to address these challenges.

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This Report includes research findings from the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, which do not represent the opinions of the investigators or the opinions of the University of Michigan.