



Health IT: What Everyone Should Know

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Each year, as many as 98,000 people die unnecessarily because of preventable medical errors. One-fifth of these errors are attributable to the lack of immediate access to patient health information. Fortunately, there may soon be a way to avoid these kinds of errors, in the process saving both lives and money.

Congress is currently reviewing legislation that would enable the widespread adoption of health information technology (health IT). Health IT includes the creation of personal, portable health records-which can be accessed wherever decisions need to be made about a patient's medical care.

According to a Wall Street Journal poll, nearly two-thirds of Americans would take advantage of this technology to access their own medical records. And nearly three-quarters of respondents agree that patients could receive better care if doctors and researchers were able to share information more easily via electronic systems.

Putting the technology into practice would improve overall efficiency, potentially saving consumers and health insurers \$81 billion a year-through eliminating duplicate and unnecessary lab tests and radiology screenings, more-efficient use of health care professionals' time, reduced expenditure on unnecessary drugs and other direct cost savings.

Here are some other ways to look at that \$81 billion in savings:

- \$81 billion could more than double the level of annual U.S. public spending on all types of medical research.
- \$81 billion could pay for the direct medical treatment costs for all types of cancer in the U.S.
- \$81 billion translates to \$670 per household per year. For the average family in America, this would represent 25 percent of their total annual out-of-pocket outlays for health care.

In addition, with the benefits of improved health outcomes included, the total savings could be as much as \$165 billion a year-enough to insure 37 million individuals, or more than three-quarters of all uninsured Americans.

For additional information about health IT, visit the Web site at www.dividedwefail.com.
To let your representatives know how you feel about this critical issue, visit
www.senate.gov and www.house.gov.

Electronic access to health care records could improve efficiency of treatment.