

Re: Very interesting article on EMR

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- *From:* Chris <chrispetersen2@xxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* 30 May 2007 22:41:14 -0700
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On May 30, 3:48 pm, bsptss <bsptss.2re...@xxxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

SAN FRANCISCO

GO into almost any medical office, hospital or clinic in the United States and your records will still be handled the old-fashioned way – on paper. You can use a computer to pay your taxes, to program your TiVo or to read a message from your great-aunt, but your doctor has to practically level a forest just to examine your medical files. The cost, however, isn't calculated in trees but in human lives: Electronic medical records would reduce the risk of medical errors and spare hospitals the expense of missing records and unnecessary treatment.

Health care providers have been dreaming about electronic records for so long that the idea has begun to seem like vaporware, a never-to-be-realized fantasy similar to flying cars and jetpacks. But there is already a clear software standard, an open-source system that's low-cost, easy to use and readily available. It could be the key to the health care system we ought to have already.

The program, WorldVistA, is based on the Veterans Affairs Department's electronic-records system, called VistA (short for Veterans Health Information Systems and Technology Architecture – and yes, they beat Bill Gates to the name). VistA stands as perhaps the greatest success story for government-developed information technology since the Internet itself.

Using the VistA record system, the veterans department has managed to improve nearly every benchmark of quality in health care. In a decade, the department increased its pneumonia vaccination rate among at-risk patients to 94 percent from only 29 percent. That translates into 6,000 saved lives and \$40 million saved each year from fewer pneumonia hospitalizations. On a host of other benchmarks – beta blocker use, cancer screening, cholesterol screening and so on – the department outperforms the nation's best care.

Thanks to VistA, costs per patient at the Veterans Health Administration system are 32 percent lower, using inflation-adjusted dollars, than they were a decade ago. Over the same period, the medical

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consumer price index has increased 50 percent for the country as a whole.

The patients are happy, too. For the past eight years, the Veterans Health Administration has outscored private-sector health care in the independent American Customer Satisfaction Index. And because VistA is government-developed software, we all own it – it's in the public domain. But while the go