

# **HEALTH CARE**

## **NEWS AND INFORMATION**

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*Health Care: News and Information* is a service of the Healthcare Leadership Council (HLC) to help our readers stay fully informed about the latest health care issues as we work to advance a high-quality health care system.

Jim Edwards, Editor

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## **E-Health Program ID's Threats to Public Health**

**A pilot project in Massachusetts has shown how electronic medical records can serve as public health lookouts.**

- The program looks at information exported from EMRs. These data can quickly expose infectious diseases.
- Such electronic detection yields evidence faster and more completely about epidemics and potential threats.
- E-health tools like this can boost the protection of Americans and U.S. public health. This protects the public, saves money and helps those who've contracted infectious diseases.

**Automated electronic reporting of public health threats can overcome problems of waiting for clinicians to pick up on and report them.**

- Several health care institutions in Massachusetts developed the Electronic Medical Record Support for Public Health Practice system, or ESP.
- The ESP computer system exports data from electronic patient records. Demographic data, vital signs, test results, diagnostic codes and medication contain clues the program looks for.
- The data from EMRs are more complete, so they indicate a patient's having conditions like gonorrhea, Chlamydia, hepatitis and inflamed pelvis. The system checks automatically, so steps can be taken sooner to treat patients and prevent the spread of the diseases.
- This pilot project checks the records of 600,000 patients at 35 clinics. ESP has found 53 percent more cases of gonorrhea and 39 percent more cases of Chlamydia than were identified through passive surveillance. It also identified undetected cases of pelvic inflammatory disease and acute hepatitis A. It even uncovered 81 pregnancies.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said after reviewing the system, "Improved reporting can help public health departments better allocate limited resources for targeted investigations and interventions."

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**E-health enjoys wide support among policymakers and health care leaders. Pilot projects like the one in Massachusetts indicate just how valuable the widespread adoption of e-health would be. E-prescribing and other applications of technology in health care delivery hold great promise. Unfortunately, finding the money to pay for such a system poses a hindrance. Health care leaders urge policymakers to consider the cost savings and other benefits, as well as the initial outlay, of moving toward electronic health care.**

*The Healthcare Leadership Council, representing the innovators in each sector of the health care industry, is committed to advancing a market-based health care system that values innovation and provides affordable, high-quality care.*

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