Let Doctors Be Doctors. It's About Time.

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LetDoctorsBeDoctors.com is a forum for healthcare professionals that allows them to communicate their vision for the future of Electronic Health Records (EHRs). (Watch video at end of article)

The objective is for healthcare professionals to share their frustrations and concerns about EHR as well as make recommendations. It is believed that by taking these steps, policy measures can be undertaken to improve the interoperability and usability of these records.

In theory, Information Technology (IT) can contribute tremendously to the healthcare system and can make it more efficient and systematic. Health IT can also empower doctors to do what they do best: be doctors and provide the best quality of care to their patients.

However, the benefits are not evident if one evaluates EHRs. The concept may be brilliant but the implementation to date has been less so. At present, managing and updating EHRs has added numerous hours to an already overflowing workload of healthcare providers. Doctors and nurses consider this task not only time-consuming but torturous and difficult.

The most negative consequence of EHR is that it has ended up being a barrier between the doctor and the patient. The time that is being wasted on managing this inefficient information tool is the time that could be more wisely invested in dealing with patients.

This discussion in no way intends to suggest that technology is something to steer clear from. Instead, the point is that technology should be adopted to increase the efficiency and reduce the workload rather than doing the opposite.

Even patients have started to complain. They feel that their doctors pay more attention to computers than to their patients. According to Bob Watcher, MD, a best-selling author, EHR is nothing but a tool that is driven by insurers and regulators who believe that digitisation will make it easy to gather statistical data. They have absolutely no clue whether this bulk of information is actually contributing towards the improvement of healthcare itself. Ironic as it may seem, healthcare seems to be the first industry that has lost efficiency and productivity after going digital.

There are several issues with the EHR system. The software is not at all user-friendly and makes an otherwise simple task fairly complex with its maze of tabs and boxes. To top it all, the information that is collected through this so-called database is nothing exceptional and is no more enlightening than that which can be garnered from other applications.

However, this does not mean that overhauling the interface of EHR will make it the ultimate digital tool for doctors. EHR will be useful only if it is able to provide the intelligence healthcare providers need to improve quality of care. Documenting is not the ultimate goal here; using the information that is documented to improve healthcare delivery is the primary objective. The current system does not record if patients had any adverse reactions to a certain medicine; the system does not provide information about any recent doctor visits or medical tests. What is the point then of spending hours and hours recording information which provides no insight?

The solution? Well, for one it would be great if they could make EHR smarter. They should also work towards simplifying the forms rather than overwhelm doctors with loads of choices. The fact of the matter is that medicine, in itself, is a fairly complex field. Making it even more complex is

definitely not a smart idea. Doctors need simplification. They need a tool that would provide them useful information in a prompt manner. They do not need time away from patients; they need technology that would enable them to spend MORE time with them.

Waiting times are already such an issue in most healthcare systems. The last thing patients need are doctors who have to spend more time ensuring they've selected the right check box rather than listening to their patient. It makes no sense and is steering doctors away from their real job: to be doctors.

Here's a little song that provides insight into the issues and frustrations with EHRs:

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