Health Information Technology and Physician-Patient Interactions: Impact of Computers on Communication During Outpatient Primary Care Visits

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As a nurse practitioner student, electronic medical record (EMR) trainer, and future EMR user, I was excited to see the Hsu et al. article, “Health Information Technology and Physician–Patient Interactions: Impact of Computers on Communication During Outpatient Primary Care Visits” in the July/August issue. I have not seen very much research about the patient’s perception of point of service computer use. This article was a welcome contribution.

I am concerned, however, that an important factor that could have influenced the results was left out of the study, i.e., more information about the type of EMR used. There are dramatic differences in the methods of data input among the various types of EMRs. These differences have the potential to affect the actions of the provider and therefore the perceptions of the patient. It would have been helpful to know specifically what type of EMR was being used in this study.

This study also failed to mention the physical setup of the examination rooms used. Ridsdale and Hudson found that patients indicate that they would like to see what is on the provider screen. Makoul et al. further emphasize the importance of setting up the examination room so that patients can have eye contact with the provider throughout the duration of the visit without having the provider turn away to enter information into the computer.

This study was a great step toward understanding the effect that using a computer at the point of service has on provider–patient interaction. In the future, research might be aimed at determining specifically which characteristics of EMRs and how they are used will have the most positive outcomes for providers and patients alike.

References

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