

Patient Concerns Regarding Computerized Medical Records: Results of Focus Group Discussions

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Background

The electronic medical record (EMR) is being used increasingly in physicians' practices. The chief rationale for this is for improved clinical decision making. There is also considerable interest in the use of this information for a variety of secondary purposes, including research and evaluation. As public trust and confidence is crucial for the success of these initiatives, developers and users of these systems need to be aware of and responsive to the concerns of the public.

Methods

We conducted focus group meetings to learn what patient concerns might be anticipated and communication issues to be addressed with the introduction of an EMR-based project called C.O.M.P.E.T.E. Four meetings were held – 2 with younger participants and 2 with older participants (≥55 years).

Results

Overall, participants were uncomfortable with the computerization of patient record information. There was fear that interactions with their physicians would become less intimate and for the potential misuse of their private information. Many appeared concerned about lack of privacy with the current paper system. Older participants seemed most concerned about the loss of health benefits through inappropriate use by government, insurance companies and by private industry. Younger participants seemed most concerned with reduced control over access to and use of the information.

Conclusions

Clinicians and researchers should be aware that public concern regarding the privacy of their health records may be greater than anticipated. Further research and education on conveying the benefits and risks of EMRs is clearly required.