


"EPEDIATRICS" SOMETHING PARENTS WANT

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"ePediatrics" something parents want

May 17, 2010 | Molly Merrill, Associate Editor

ANN ARBOR, MI – "ePediatrics" could become more common, as parents are requesting more electronic communication with their children's doctors, according to a new poll.

According to a national poll by C.S. Mott Children's Hospital in Ann Arbor, Mich., about one-half of parents think it would be very helpful to be able to accomplish administrative and clinical tasks such as requesting records or prescription refills through e-mail or online.

The poll, conducted by Knowledge Networks, Inc. in January 2010, asked 1,612 parents of children ages 0-17 across the United States about how they communicate with their children's healthcare providers.

Although the poll found that half of parents would like to have access to electronic communication features with their children's doctor's office, less than 15 percent of parents reported that they are currently able to have online or e-mail communication with their children's healthcare providers.

"Electronic communication between parents and their children's healthcare providers offers a lot of potential benefits," says Matthew Davis, MD, director of the poll and associate professor of pediatrics and communicable diseases in the CHEAR Unit at the University of Michigan Medical School. "For administrative tasks that almost all parents need to complete, electronic communication can reduce wasted time and minimize frustration for both parents and office staff. For clinical services, parents often have questions about whether minor injuries or illnesses require an office visit; electronic communication provides a way to obtain advice without waiting on hold for long periods of time."

In a similar study by Johns Hopkins Children's Center nearly 90 percent of the 229 parents polled said they would welcome e-mail as a way to communicate with their child's doctor. The study, which was conducted earlier this month, found that only 11 percent could currently do so. Hopkins investigators said they are planning a study of pediatricians' attitudes toward e-mail.

Most physicians who are reluctant to e-mail today, chose not to because they are not reimbursed for electronic services or because they are concerned that these types of services could leave them susceptible to medical liability.

"Some healthcare providers have expressed concerns about reimbursement for electronic services that require staff time. Others worry about medical liability associated with offering clinical advice via e-mail or the Internet, without examining the patient," says Davis, who is also associate professor of internal medicine and associate professor of public policy at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy. "However, given the strong endorsement for electronic communication from this national sample of parents, significant efforts should be made to address these challenges. The obvious advantages of electronic medical records – efficiency, clarity, documentation – are the same reasons why we should work to make e-communications available for our patients and families."

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