

Do EHRs blur the marketing/assistance divide?

PROFESSIONALS have been griping about electronic health records for some time, even though adoption has spiked: Use among small practices jumped 10% in the first half of 2014 and about 70% of hospitals had implemented EHRs by then.

Perceived as onerous and inconsistent, EHRs have also provided marketers with an ability to get in front of physicians through alliances like those between Merck and Practice Fusion or the efforts like those of the Physicians' Desk Reference and eMPR, which offer brands front-and-center attention throughout a professional's day. (Disclosure: *MM&M's* parent company, Haymarket Media, owns eMPR.)

Drs. Christopher Manz, Joseph Ross and David Grande write in the *New England Journal of Medicine* that this marketing access is another reason to be disgruntled, since EHRs have essentially become marketing



Dr. Joseph Ross is among those questioning EHRs and marketing

pathways that undermine no-see policies that many hospital groups set up for the very purpose of separating marketers and diagnosticians.

Among the ways they say digital access is helping pharma become smarter: Digital tools provide the same feedback digital wanderings provide for everyday searches, allowing EHR vendors, like Practice Fusion, to sell anonymous clinical trial data pulled from patient records.

They also note that networking services like Doximity and Sermo are part of the marketing loop because they provide sponsored discussion forums and surveys in which doctors can trade information and opinions in exchange for rewards. Epocrates also gets dinged—the doctors note that the “widely used mobile application for physicians” tracks search patterns and uses this information to serve DocAlerts that are usually industry sponsored.

Some of their concern lies with how, and if, professionals perceive this outreach as marketing or assistance. Using eCoupons as an example, they note that doctors may consider this a financial management tool “rather than marketing.” They are also concerned that the seamless integration of medical information and marketing will make parsing the two increasingly difficult.

Their recommendation?

Apply the same logic used to police traditional marketing practices to digital ones, beginning with transparency requirements for how EHR data is used. They urge professional organizations to create reporting standards and propose that HHS embed transparency requirements into EHR meaningful-use descriptions.

The trio also recommend applying Sunshine rules to digital outreach, requiring, for example, that payments linked to networking services challenges be reported under the Physician Payments Sunshine act and that professional groups implement “firewalls to keep marketing out of patient visits—as they did with free pens and other traditional marketing tools.”

There is also a more straightforward recommendation, which is that health systems and groups refuse to use EHRs and other tools that have marketing add-ons. —Deborah Weinstein

Trial recruiting taps online community leaders

A THREE-WAY partnership of CureClick.com, WEGO Health and TrialReach has been implemented with hopes of enlisting influential patient opinion leaders to accelerate clinical trial recruitment and completion.

The approach combines CureClick.com's ability to enlist opinion leaders' use of proprietary crowd-sourcing software with WEGO's health social network of more than 100,000 active bloggers and tweeters on health issues that are considered most relevant today. TrialReach brings a database on clinical trials with content that, the company says, is easy for patients to understand.

The model aims to provide trial candidates with a full view of the role they might play in a



CureClick's Fabio Gratton thinks patients like helping patients

trial and places it within the context of a supporting community that is fully engaged in advancing its health.

“Patients trust other patients, and opportunities to help patient advocates become ambassadors for clinical research can only help address the challenge of study recruitment,” Craig Lipset, head of clinical innovation at Pfizer, told *MM&M*.

Such community-based tactics presumably could address longstanding trial challenges, including low female representation and the scarcity of subjects for rare diseases. While the new model might be seen as a challenge to traditional CRO recruitment, CROs themselves are exploring new technologies to this end.

CureClick provides videos, trial information and guidelines for sharing and disseminating

clinical trial information from CureClick and its partners.

The tools are available to the WEGO health network of influential Health Activists who drive healthcare conversations on an array of health topics and conditions in online communities. The tools, training and information that CureClick provides to the thousands in WEGO's network will “take recruitment to a whole new level,” TrialReach CEO Pablo Graiver said in a statement. “There is no one more motivated to solve this problem of patients not knowing about or taking part in clinical trials than other patients. We have seen how powerful patient advocates are at TrialReach.”

—David Vaczek