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Recent studies show that the adoption of electronic patient records has gained significant momentum over the last two years as an increasing number of American health providers and related companies in the healthcare industry have sought software solutions to convert their patient records, financial information, and other documents into a user-friendly electronic format. According to a report from market analysts at IDC Health Insights, over 80 percent of healthcare providers will have an electronic healthcare system in place by 2016. These health care software solutions promise increased efficiency, a reduction in clinical and clerical errors, improved patient satisfaction, and enormous cost savings across the field of medicine.

The report, published in November 2011 and titled â€œIDC MarketScape: U.S. Ambulatory EMR/EHR for Midsize and Large Practices 2011 Vendor Assessment,â€• targeted midsize and large practices. The study focused on electronic patient records designed for the ambulatory market, and included a survey of vendors and the healthcare providers they serve as clients/customers. In addition to surveying vendors and their customers based on comprehensive assessment criteria, IDC Health Insights independently evaluated the technology offerings and financial viability of the vendors. IDC Health Insights combined the information they gathered to ascertain how well the various vendorsâ€™ applications fit market needs and satisfied customers.

According to Judy Hanover, research director at IDC Health Insights, vendors and healthcare providers alike have shown great commitment to making these health care software solutions work. The study found that some electronic records systems are more usable than others. â€œWith a high number of vendors in this evolving market, it is important to provide a way for providers to sort through them and select those that meet the needs of their practices, now and in the next few years,â€• she said. Hanover said that the study focused on four key ingredients for a successful system, those being â€œfunctionality, usability, interoperability, and customer satisfaction.â€•

In general, the industry is seeing better functionality across the board, and the healthcare IT industry continues to promise further gains in workflow management and productivity. â€œWeâ€™re talking about chart capture; weâ€™re talking about being able to manage data, document phone calls, document communications, prepare a medical history, have easy access to a patientâ€™s medical history, generate alerts to help with order entry and with e-prescribing to protect patient safety,â€• said Hanover. â€œThatâ€™s what Iâ€™m talking about when I talk about functionality in the mid-to-large size p EHR.â€•

In 2009, only 25 percent of healthcare companies were using electronic health records, and the percentage of EHR-enabled private medical practices was much lower still. The forecast for rapid adoption over the next few years puts a lot of pressure on the Health IT sector to deliver, and so far the future of a connected healthcare system seems promising.

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