

Do Years of Experience with Electronic Health Records Matter for Productivity in Community Health Centers?

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OBJECTIVE

Community health centers' (CHCs) patient panels are expected to increase in the coming years. This study investigated to what the years of experience with an electronic health record (EHR) was related to the productivity of CHCs.

DATA/SETTING

We primarily drew from the 2012 Uniform Data System, an annual reporting system of 1198 CHCs receiving federal Section 330 grants. We also used the "Readiness Survey" to categorize CHCs by years of experience with an EHR.

DESIGN/METHODS

We estimated a log-linear model of average annual medical visits, weighted for service intensity, as a function of full-time equivalent medical staff controlling for CHC size and location. We compared the productivity of each type of medical staff by presence of an EHR, EHR vendor, and years of EHR experience.

RESULTS

Physician productivity significantly improved in CHCs with three to four years of EHR experience. Nurses experienced a notable negative productivity impact in the early years of EHR adoption, although the trend was not statistically significant.

CONCLUSIONS

Attention should be paid as to whether nurses are diverted away from clinical duties to manage administrative tasks related to EHRs, and whether staffing levels are sufficient to support the implementation of EHRs. CHCs may need additional support and training especially for nurses in order to maintain the CHCs' current patient panel, and even more so if the patient population expands as Medicaid coverage expands under the Affordable Care Act.

Key Words: electronic health records; community health centers; productivity; workforce