

Doctors slow to adopt electronic prescriptions

BY TRACEY DRURY
 tdrury@bizjournals.com | 716-541-1609

Despite a push by insurers and the federal government toward increased use of electronic medical records, only about one-quarter of physicians Upstate have begun using e-prescribing systems with their patients.

But a new report by Univera Healthcare shows Upstate residents could be saving time and money – and reducing errors – if more health providers sent prescription information to pharmacies electronically. The report on trends and benefits of electronic prescribing analyzed prescription trends in 2009 and first quarter of 2010, and found 65 percent of prescriptions were still handwritten or printed on paper, while 18 percent were phoned or faxed in to pharmacies.

According to the report, an estimated 30 percent of prescriptions that are not e-prescribed require a callback for clarity or missing information. Additionally, handwritten prescriptions can more easily be forged.

Besides saving time and money for both providers and patients, e-prescribing has the potential to prevent 35 deaths per year, 400 hospitalizations and 3,000 physician office visits, says Dr. Robert Holzhauer, vice president and chief medical officer at Univera.

"Doctors working with electronic medical records can basically point and click to prescribe exactly what they want," he says. "If there's a less-expensive generic available, it will prompt them. Or if there's a drug allergy, the system knows about it and they'll be given a prompt. There are safety features, cost-savings features and it's convenient."

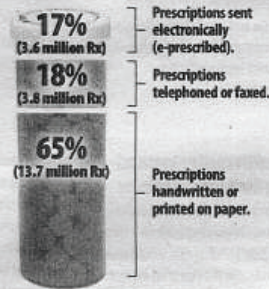
Orchard Park Family Practice began using e-prescriptions about three years ago. Though the practice still receives some calls from the pharmacy for clarification or for insurance questions, the number of calls has gone down with questions related to illegible handwriting. Additionally, the system automatically sends refill notices to the pharmacy, says Dr. Jennifer Ruh, one of nine providers at the practice.

Ruh also has the ability to log into the system when working on call from home, where she can view patient histories and quickly fax information.

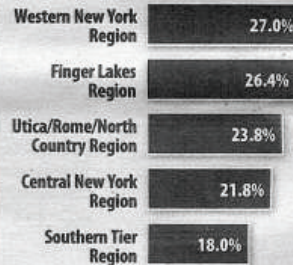
"Patients seem delighted with it," she says. "The pharmacy can automatically send us a message that their prescription is due and if we see that the patient has regular appointments and has lab work, we automatically do it. It saves them a phone call when they can have another refill and

E-prescribing in Upstate New York, 2010 trend

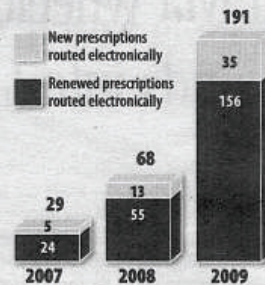
The e-prescribing rate in Upstate New York increased from 12 percent in 2009 to 17 percent in the first quarter of 2010. This represents 3.6 million new and renewed prescriptions on an annual basis.



Physicians who e-prescribe, 2009



E-prescribing in the U.S. (in millions)



SOURCES: UNIVERA HEALTHCARE AND SURESCRIPTS