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## New Data Show Internet, Website and Email Usage by Physicians All Increasing

*Security and privacy concerns remain barriers to electronic transfer of clinical information*

The proportions of practicing physicians who are online from home, from their personal office areas and their clinical work areas are all increasing. Their staff is also using the Internet more often for both clinical and administrative work. Most physicians now go online on a daily basis. Two out of every five doctors work in practices with (that have) websites, up from just over a quarter thirteen months earlier.

These are some of the findings of a new nationwide Harris Interactive survey of 834 physicians, **Computing in the Physicians' Practice**, conducted between January 3 and February 7, 2001. Well over half (55%) of all practicing physicians use email to communicate with professional colleagues, and a third (34%) use email to communicate with their support staff. However, only 13% of all doctors communicate with any of their patients via email.

### Trends 1999 – 2001

Internet, website and email usage have all increased significantly, but not dramatically, since December 1999 when the previous **Computing in the Physicians' Practice** survey was conducted:

- The proportion of all practicing physicians using the Internet has grown in the clinical work area (from 34% to 40%), in their personal offices (from 51% to 56%) and at home (from 83% to 87%).
- Only 7% of physicians are not online anywhere, compared to 11% in 1999.
- 42% of all physicians work in practices with websites, up from 29% in 1999.
- More doctors are communicating by email with both professional colleagues (up from 51% to 55%) and support staff (up from 25% to 34%).
- Only 36% of physicians are **not** using email to communicate with staff, colleagues, patients or third party payers, compared to 42% in 1999.

**TABLE 1**  
**Physician Use of Internet 1999 and 2001**

	1999 %	2001 %
<b>Physicians Currently Online</b>		
From anywhere	89	93
At home	83	87
In personal office area	51	56
In clinical work area	34	40
<b>Physicians' Staff Currently Online</b>		
Other clinical staff in physicians' clinical work area	38	46
Administrative staff in office	50	62
<b>Physicians Who Use the Internet Daily</b>		
As percentage of those online	N/A	64
As percentage of all physicians	N/A	59
<b>Physicians in Practices with Websites</b>		
As percentage of those online	32	45
As percentage of all physicians	29	42
<b>Physicians Who Use Email to Communicate To communicate with:</b>		
Support staff	25	34
Patients	13	13
Health plans, IPAs, other payers	8	9
Professional colleagues	51	55
None of the above	42	36

### Privacy and Security Major Barriers to Email Usage

Only a few physicians are sending clinical information about individual patients via email. However, this would rapidly increase if medical records' privacy were guaranteed.

Only 6% of physicians regularly use email to send clinical information about individual patients (such as consultations with colleagues or patients, or ordering prescriptions) *and are not inhibited about concerns about privacy and security*. Another small minority (8%) uses email to send clinical information but *"would do so even more if security and privacy were fully guaranteed."*

Therefore, in total only one in seven doctors (14%) is using email to send any patient-specific clinical information. Many more (39%) do not do so now but say they would do so *"if the security and privacy of emails were guaranteed."* However, even if security and privacy were non-issues, fully 40% of physicians say they would not send clinical information by email.

## So What?

The medical Internet revolution is still in its infancy. However, there should be no doubt that the Internet will become widely used by physicians before very long and that it will present many changes to the way things are done in most practices. Like other new technologies, it is being used initially, if at all, to replace other, less efficient, methods of communications. Before long, however, it will surely be used to perform many other functions that were not previously possible or cost-effective using older technologies.

These new Harris Interactive data underline the relative importance of providing physicians, hospitals and diagnostic laboratories with secure email systems which will protect the privacy of personal medical records. When such systems are widely available, one major barrier to the electronic transfer of clinical information will have been eliminated.

**TABLE 2**

**Reasons for Use and for Non-use of Email for Clinical Information**

**Base:** All Physicians

	2001 %
I regularly email clinical information and am not inhibited in doing so by concerns about security and privacy	6
I frequently email clinical information but would do so even more if security and privacy of emails were fully guaranteed	8
I don't currently email clinical information, but would if the security and privacy of emails were fully guaranteed	39
Even if the security and privacy of emails were fully guaranteed, I would not email clinical information for reasons other than concerns about security and privacy	40

## About Harris Interactive

Harris Interactive (Nasdaq: HPOL), the global leader in online market research, uses Internet-based and traditional methodologies to provide its clients with information about the views, experiences, behaviors and attitudes of people worldwide. Known for its *Harris Poll*, Harris Interactive has over 45 years experience in providing its clients with market research and polling services including custom, multi-client and service bureau research, as well as customer relationship management services. Through its U.S. and Global Network offices, Harris Interactive conducts research around the world, in multiple, localized languages. Harris Interactive uses its proprietary technology to survey its database of more than 7 million online panelists. For more information about Harris Interactive, please visit our website at [www.harrisinteractive.com](http://www.harrisinteractive.com)  
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