

Technology & Information

“MySpaces” for Docs

Internet communities are not just for the MySpace generation who trade photos, gossip, and who knows what else online. Sermo is the latest “MySpace” type Web site where physicians can consult an entire community of colleagues in all medical specialties about latest medical breakthroughs or drug reactions and interactions.

Cambridge, Massachusetts-based Sermo was founded in September, 2006, by Daniel Palestrant, MD. The surgeon noted that many physicians were aware of the red flags for Merck’s painkiller Vioxx and Medtronic’s dysfunctional pacemakers long before they turned into major scandals in the mainstream press. By providing physicians with an online community, Palestrant feels he is giving them a venue to discuss such important issues and perhaps decide their importance before they become headline news. In fact, the American Medical Association (AMA) has announced plans to partner with Sermo, stating that the 2-year agreement “opens a new line of communication,” allowing physicians to discuss individual patient cases, pending drug approvals, and more.

The site provides an easy way for physicians to share medical observations with colleagues as they are happening, have their opinions challenged or corroborated, and allow their voices to be heard. Investment companies can view the information for a fee of \$100,000 to \$500,000. According to Sermo, about 15,000 physicians have joined since the Web site launched. Membership is free to physicians, and the site blocks pharmaceutical and medical device companies from accessing the site. Physicians can sign up at: www.sermo.com.

Epocrates, at www.epocrates.com/index.html, has been on the Web site much longer, offering an extensive line of remote access tools, such as PDA medical software (dictionaries and coders, for example), mobile continuing medical education (CME), health insurance formularies, drug infor-

mation, and clinical applications. Also included are survey results published as *Epocrates Insights*, in which physicians can speak out on issues such as obesity or depression.

The Kaiser Family Foundation (www.kff.org) includes a wealth of state and global health statistics, Medicare and Medicaid news, trends and indicators in health insurance, information on minority and women’s health, prescription drug trends, HIV/AIDS resources, Federal budgetary information that directly impacts physicians, and the results of wide variety of healthcare polls.

Of course, www.cms.hhs.gov, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Web site, provides the latest information on regulations, coding practices, preventive services, enrollment, payment information, statistics and trends, new initiatives, and news related to Medicare.

MDChoice (www.mdchoice.com), a privately held company founded by academic physicians, offers virtual rounds, including photo rounds, ECG rounds, radiology rounds, pediatric radiology rounds, and cyber patient simulations. A

The VA's WorldVista EMR, is “perhaps the greatest success story for government-developed information technology since the Internet itself.”

reading room contains full-text journal articles. Other resources include calculators and algorithms, health news, and drug information.

Elsevier’s MDConsult is a subscription-based online searchable database of full-text Medline journal articles, medical textbooks, and drug information. Check it out at www.mdconsult.com/php/72384597-2/homepage. One-month free subscriptions are available.

Significant Progress Reported in HIT Adoption

The Silicon Valley Pay-for-Performance Consortium, a collaborative effort started by Cisco, Intel Corporation, and Oracle along with several large California physician organizations to accelerate

the use of technology for quality health care, announced first-year results that demonstrate impressive strides in the adoption and use of patient-centric systems and processes.

The consortium includes 7 physician organizations in 25 practice sites with over 1800 physicians. The organizations received National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA) Physician Practice Connections (PPC) recognition, a nationally recognized set of quality-of-care standards, which qualifies them to earn financial rewards for instituting new health information technology (HIT) systems to improve the patient experience and outcomes.

After 1 year, all 7 organizations reported making the following patient-centric improvements:

- 57% created patient scheduling and appointment reminder systems.
- 43% began to accommodate same-day appointments and use data mining technologies for more advanced patient information management.
- 28% reported instituting electronic health records (EHRs), disease registries, clinician reminder systems, and guaranteed post-hospital follow-up systems. Additionally this same percentage reported increased use of e-prescribing, e-lab, and e-radiology results.
- 28% began to use electronic messaging, instituted an improved care-management process, and increased use of existing EHRs and systems to better manage patient medication lists.
- 14% implemented better systems to track referrals, made progress towards implementing an EHR system, and also reported streamlining work flows.

According to Jeffrey Rideout, Cisco's vice president of healthcare, Internet Business Solutions Group, and Cisco's chief medical officer, "These impressive results in just over a year underscore the transformational impact of implementing patient-centric health information technology systems and are really a tribute to those participating medical groups and IPAs who took on this program voluntarily."

The 7 organizations participating in the consortium include Camino Medical Group, Kaiser Permanente, Palo Alto Medical Foundation, Stanford Hospital & Clinics, San Jose Medical Group, Santa Clara County Individual Practice Association (SCCIPA), and Santa Cruz Medical Foundation.

In this last year, the Silicon Valley Pay-for-Performance Consortium was made part of the national Bridges to Ex-

cellence (BTE) program (www.bridgestoexcellence.org) that recognizes and rewards healthcare providers who demonstrate the delivery of high-quality patient-centered care. The consortium's physician organizations met the IT standards of the Integrated Healthcare Association (IHA)'s pay-for-performance program, qualifying them for further rewards from California health plans. Total financial rewards of \$584,000 are being paid this year to the 7 physician organizations.

Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield Launches Personal Health Record

Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield, Pittsburgh, PA, reports that its 3.1 million members can now view and manage their healthcare information through a secure and Web-based tool that uses medical claims, administrative information, and information entered by members themselves to provide a comprehensive and historical view of members' health and use of the healthcare system. The personal health record (PHR) offers members a personalized health action plan with specific action items for health improvements, links to programs to manage possible health issues, and detailed information about educational information about health conditions.

Those members who have diabetes, asthma, coronary artery disease, or one of more than 30 other health conditions can access a "condition manager" that provides specific programs, tools, and information about their disorders. Record-keeping functionality includes medication tracking, immunizations, physician information, treatment history, and allergies. Members can keep records on important health measures, such as blood glucose, blood pressure, cholesterol, and weight. For more information, visit www.highmark.com.

Aetna Introduces Interactive Personal Health Record

Aetna has announced the launch of its *CareEngine*[®] System personal health record (PHR) that provides members with online access to personal information, including individual personalized messages and alerts, detailed health history, and integrated information

and resources to help them make informed decisions about their health care.

The system works by continuously scanning an individual's health data and claims information against medical literature, and alerts consumers and physicians about possible urgent situations and opportunities to improve care. Data from physician offices, labs, diagnostic treatments, and prescriptions are included in the PHR. For more information, see: www.aetna.com.

Teaming up to Provide Cancer EMR

GE Healthcare and IntrinsicQ, a provider of cancer care software, are teaming up to provide clinical information from patients' electronic medical records (EMRs) within GE's Centricity EMR solution.

Waltham, MA-based IntrinsicQ developed IntelliDose, software that automates the process of chemotherapy order entry to reduce error potential.

States Simeon Schwartz, MD, chief executive officer of Westchester Medical Group, a user of the Centricity system, "By interfacing our Centricity EMR system with the Intellidose software, our practice has virtually gone from the Flintstones to the Jetsons in a matter of weeks."

For more information, see www.gehealthcare.com/user/hit/products/centricity_practice/emr_index.html.

VA's EHR System Garner's Praise

The Department of Veterans Affairs' EHR software program, WorldVistA, has been praised by *Wired* deputy editor Thomas Goetz as "perhaps the greatest success story for government-developed information technology since the Internet itself." According to Goetz, WorldVistA, is "an open-source system that's low-cost, easy to use, and readily available." Goetz claims it is one-tenth the cost of proprietary software and is ready for broad adoption.

WorldVistA is based on the VA's electronic-records system, called VistA (short for Veterans Health Information Systems and Technology Architecture). The program, which was started in 2002, has received approval from the Certification Commission for Healthcare Information Technology and is ready for adoption. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) supports promotion of WorldVistA with a grant.

Goetz writes in an Op-Ed piece in *The New York Times*, "WorldVistA's big promise is that it can become the nationwide standard for electronic medical records, the backbone of a national network of health care." To read Goetz's entire piece, see: www.nytimes.com. The article is a May 30, 2007 opinion piece.

IRS Ruling Clarifies Tax Exemption on Sharing HIT

A 2006 Internal Revenue Service ruling allows non-profit hospitals to donate healthcare information technology (HIT) to private practice physicians, according to the American Hospital Association. Although hospitals can now share their electronic medical record (EMR) and e-prescribing systems with physician offices without losing their tax-exempt status, physicians should be cautious in accepting such offers. Experts say physicians should make sure they can help choose the EMR or e-prescribing system they receive and can verify that their patients' privacy won't be compromised. Because the ruling is new, some questions are unanswered. Physicians should also check to see if they can keep the EMR if they sever ties with the hospital and whether they have to pay taxes on it. For more information see: www.healthdatamanagement.com.

AMA Launches Therapeutic Insights

An online self-assessment tool, called *AMA Therapeutic Insights*, has been launched by the AMA. It uses physician-level prescribing patterns and evidence-based guidelines to help enhance clinical practices and improve patient care. AMA Chair-elect Edward L. Langston, MD, says, "The goal of the project is to improve the quality of patient care by increasing physicians' knowledge of the latest scientific evidence on the use of drug therapies, as well as providing insights into physician prescribing patterns."

Using this tool, physicians can access state and national comparisons showing which drugs are prescribed by their peers for specific medical conditions. The prescribing data included are provided by IMS Health and do not contain patient identifiable information. For more information, see: www.amaassn.org/go/therapeuticinsights. MPM