

Use of Technology in Health Care

The use of technology in health care now includes desktop, networked, and laptop computers as well as personalized digital assistants (PDAs) such as Palm Pilots and pocket PCs. *Senior Care Digest* surveyed healthcare providers, asking questions about their use of technology in their practices.

Discussion of Data

Directors of nursing (DONs) reported the most common use of desktop and networked computers; 86% of surveyed DONs use

these technologies for administrative purposes. Eighty-three percent of DONs use them for preparing reports (Figure 1).

Pharmacists reported the next

most common use of desktop and networked computers; 65% of pharmacists use these technologies for processing new prescription orders. Pharmacists reported the highest use of laptop computers; 60% of surveyed pharmacists use laptops to prepare and present in-service education, and 54% of pharmacists use laptops to prepare reports.

No more than one-third of the other 3 disciplines reported using

Figure 1. Use of Technology by Pharmacists, DONs, and NPs

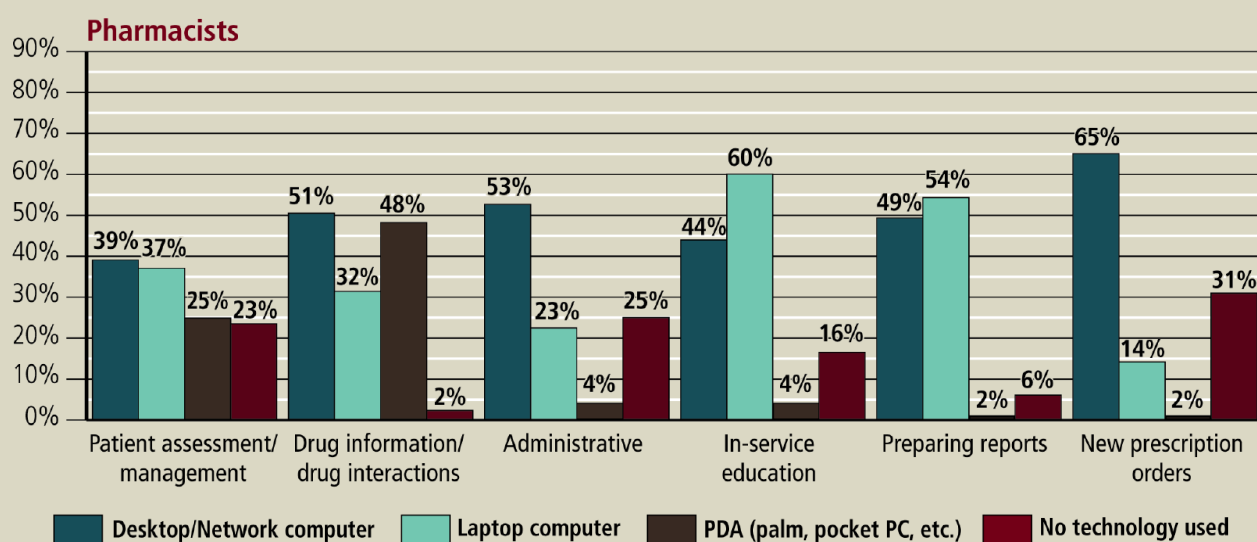
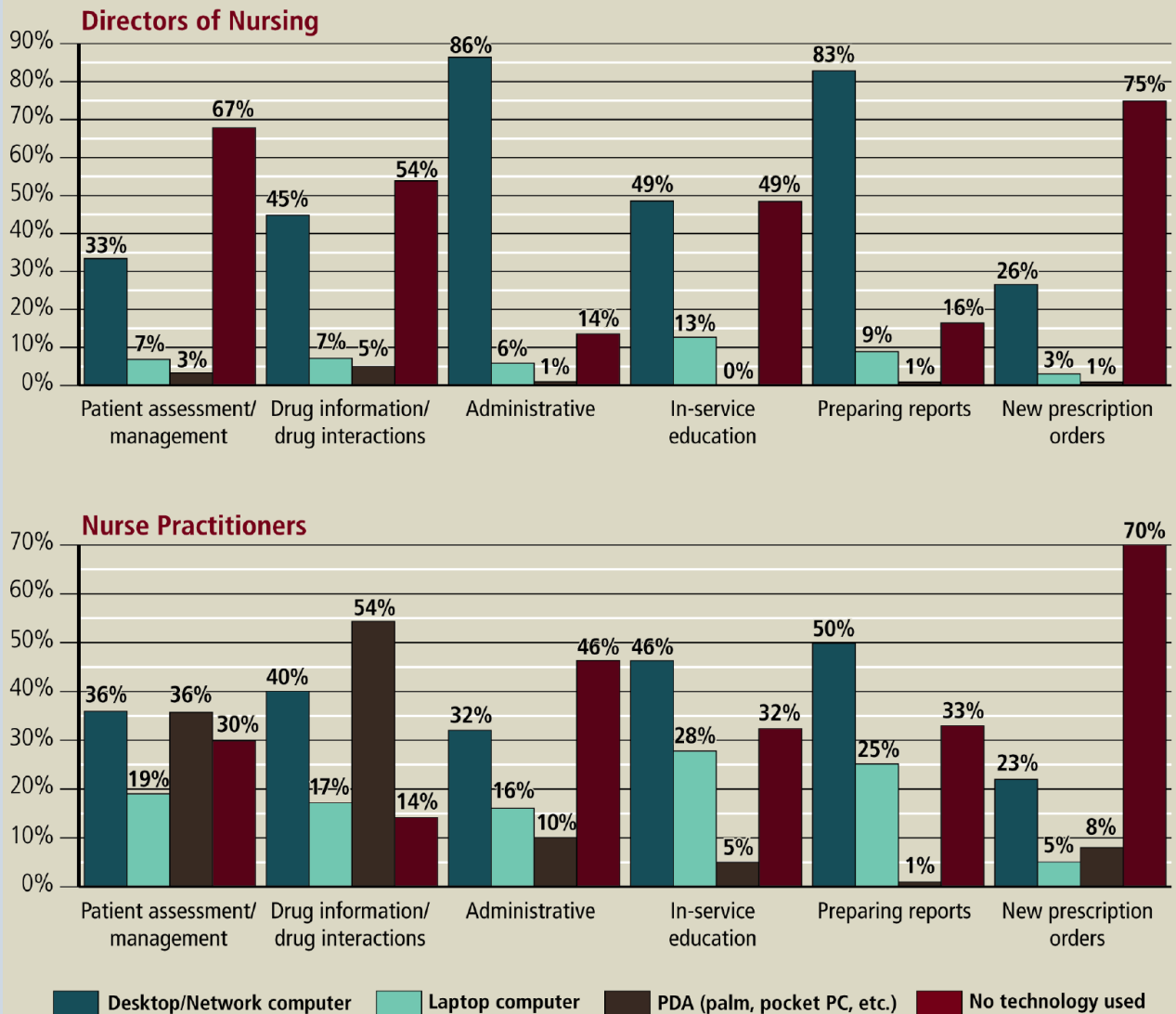


Figure 1. Use of Technology by Pharmacists, DONs, and NPs (continued)



laptops for any purpose. Nurse practitioners (NPs) said they use laptops for in-service education (28%) and preparing reports (25%). Physicians (26%) and DONs (13%) use laptops for in-service education.

The use of PDAs varies considerably among respondents. Most commonly they are used for researching drug information and drug interactions; NPs reported the highest use at 54%; followed

by pharmacists, 48%; medical directors, 36% (Figure 2); and DONs, 5%.

PDAs are used next most commonly for patient assessment and management; 36% of surveyed NPs use PDAs for this purpose, as do 25% of pharmacists and 19% of medical directors.

Commentary

To interpret the survey data with a proper perspective, the degree of

heterogeneity of tasks within each participating discipline must be taken into account. For example, employment models and responsibilities of DONs were relatively similar, owing to the nature of this position, regardless of the facility in which the respondents were working. In contrast, pharmacists' responsibilities could vary considerably, depending on whether they were employed full- or part-time and whether their tasks centered

PROVIDER ACTION

Impact to You

Through the use of technology, physicians and other healthcare providers can realize increased efficiency, improved care of their patients, and increased revenue in their practices.

What You Need to Know

Healthcare practitioners need to know how to use technology for patient assessment and management, drug information, administrative tasks, in-service education, report preparation, and e-prescribing.

What You Need to Do

Practitioners need to work now to identify opportunities for technology in their practices and then take the needed steps to implement these systems successfully. Basically the bottom line is to "just do it." Of course, a great deal of preparation is needed to make sure that the "it" is done correctly.

on administrative work, the dispensing of outpatient prescriptions, or the performance of medication regimen reviews (MRRs).

While approximately half of the surveyed pharmacists said they use laptop computers for preparing reports, it is highly likely that nearly all pharmacists who visit nursing facilities to perform MRRs rely on

laptop computers to some degree. Typically, pharmacists involved in this type of practice use laptops to prepare reports based on the findings of their reviews.

On the other hand, it is not surprising that DONs reported infrequent use of laptops; it is more likely that they would use a computer terminal in their office or at

the nursing station.

Developments within the long-term care environment may drive the use of some technology applications. For example, the use of a PDA might assist in navigating through the myriad formularies developed by Medicare Part D prescription drug plans.

Technology offers the opportunity to improve care by enabling prescribers to evaluate a resident's condition in a more timely manner. Technology also may make the best use of staffing, possibly decreasing staff turnover.

Given the availability of handheld portable computers, some of which offer telephone and Internet access, it is safe to assume that the use of these and emerging technologies will increase. *MPM*

These data are drawn from the 2007 *Senior Care Digest* Interdisciplinary Report, part of the sanofi-aventis Managed Care Digest Series®.

Figure 2. Use of Technology by Medical Directors

