



Electronic Health Records Make Doctors Accountable -- and Some Don't Like That

February 13, 2012 by *Patrick A. Malone*

Electronic health records (EHRs) hold much promise for reducing medical errors and improving quality of care, but the prospect that patient advocates can use EHRs to do an autopsy of where a patient's care went wrong has some in the medical industry sounding an alarm.

Last week a story (actually a press release, on closer scrutiny) in the Wall Street Journal's Market Watch talked about "[Crippling Access to Physician's Actions](#)" allowed by [tattle-tale Electronic Health Records](#). Among the horrors described by IT consultant Dr. Sam Bierbock:

EHRs ... can also be audited to examine how long it took them to act after an abnormal lab result came in, if the doctor checked on on-line references before making a clinical decision, what was said in every email and how long the doctor took to respond, and even how long the doctor looked at a screen or scrolled down to read an entire document.

And this is a bad thing?

Fortunately there are patient advocates in the medical informatics industry. One is Scot Silverstein, MD, of Drexel University, who trained as a doctor in intensive care units, which have heavy demands for up-to-the-second monitoring information on the desperately ill patients they care for. [Dr. Silverstein wrote a well-informed blog post on the real](#)

Patrick A. Malone
Patrick Malone & Associates, P.C.
1331 H Street N.W.
Suite 902
Washington, DC 20005

pmalone@patrickmalonelaw.com
www.patrickmalonelaw.com
202-742-1500
202-742-1515 (fax)

problems with EHRs and why it won't wash to make plaintiff attorneys and malpractice lawsuits the whipping boy for the industry's troubles.

Our firm represented a patient's family last year in a particularly tragic malpractice case where we used the hospital's "audit trail" of EHR records to show that a nurse was claiming to be in two places at one time. Her neglect led to the stillbirth of our family's child.

The alarm of IT consultants like Dr. Bierbock over the ease of auditing health care brought about by EHR's is really a false alarm. Yes, there will be closer scrutiny of medical decisions. But audit trails will lead to more accurate understanding of what happened in any tragic injury, and that should lead to better care for all.

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