

Healthcare IT News

Ready for 'real results' on e-scripts

By [Bernie Monegain, Editor](#) | 09/01/07 | MONEGAIN 0907

Electronic prescribing got a big boost last month when Alaska became the last state to pave the way for digital scripts by eliminating state laws that prohibited it.

That there were states still outlawing digital prescribing in this so-called information age is amazing. It's hard to imagine life without e-mail or the ATM. When was the last time we wrote a check – by hand? When was the last time any of us went inside a bank to withdraw cash?

Today it would seem quaint.

Yet patients all around the country still walk into their drug stores to hand over a handwritten prescription they received from their doctor. They either wait for a half hour or more, or they plan a second trip to the pharmacy to pick up their order.

Meanwhile, the pharmacist is deciphering the physician's handwriting.

Allscripts CEO Glen Tullman views e-prescribing as an on ramp for the adoption of more information technology by physicians. That makes sense. Can anyone imagine the Nationwide Health Information Network with paper scripts?

Industry insiders hailed the news about Alaska as a "major milestone," and it is. But, the fact that Alaska and other states – nearly half – have changed their laws to allow the exchange of prescription information electronically doesn't mean they will.

That's why the work SureScripts is doing across the country is so vital. SureScripts, which operates the Pharmacy Health Information Exchange, has certified the software solutions being used by more than 95 percent of the nation's retail pharmacies. Founded by the pharmacy industry in 2001, the organization works closely with pharmacies to help them with digital exchange.

But even if the pharmacies are prepared for e-prescribing, it will do nothing for digital exchange if physicians are not on board, too.

That's why the second piece of news announced at the same time as the Alaskan milestone is so critical.

SureScripts is joining with physicians and payers to advance the use of e-prescribing. They're not talking about a few physicians here and there or a payer or two. The alliance includes two premier physicians organizations known for their leadership on the IT front – the American Academy of Family Physicians and the Medical Group Management Association. The payers are the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, Humana and the Intel Corporation.

Together they will form The Center for Improving Medication Management.

Initial discussions are under way with the RAND Corporation and the center to develop a project that would demonstrate how certain features of e-prescribing and EMR technology impact medication safety, medication use and labor costs for the practices involved.

"We look forward to collaborating with the center to help family physicians implement health information technology that will improve the safety and effectiveness of medication for their patients," said Steven Waldren, director of the AAFP's Center for Health Information Technology, and a board member of the new center.

"We're hoping to do something that hasn't been done before," SuresScripts CEO Kevin Hutchinson told Healthcare IT News. "We don't want this to be simply a think tank, where we debate things like the value of standards. We want to create projects that lead to real results."

Real results. We're all ready for that. And the organizations involved in this new center are known for producing results. They are also known for keeping patient safety at the forefront. They're on the right on-ramp.