

# PC

## PRESIDENT'S COMMENT

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**Bruce J. Applebaum, M.D.**

*President*

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### **EHR: electronic health record or eternal headache rouser**

Today I went to see my PCP for my annual physical. Thank goodness I passed with flying colors. I enjoyed my visit with him except for the mandatory prostate check. As always, he is very gracious with his time and commitment to my health. His focus on me and willingness to talk about my health concerns never waivers. I assume he gives the same dedication to his other patients. He is a premier example of what a PCP should be.

He and his associates recently moved to a new location. It is a nice and comfortable office with all the amenities. I noticed during our visit what appeared to be a new EHR (electronic health record), as I recalled a year earlier his office was still using the archaic, outmoded, and horrific paper charts (insert tongue into cheek). I was amazed that these relics were still being used last year, and the clutter of charts throughout the office was clear. Last year these "hold outs" were clinging to a soon to be extinct remnant of our office past. With their physical move, they finally made the proverbial "leap" into the EHR.

At a superficial glance, it appeared to me that this was a smoothly functioning system. I consider myself to be familiar with EHRs since I have had the opportunity to use several different ones since 2003. I started with a voice recognition system, then I used a tab oriented entry and template system, and then a web-based system. With each system there was a steep learning curve, and with each system there was an inevitable terminal velocity (meaning no matter how good or efficient I was at using the system, eventually I reached a speed that was limited by the system itself, a speed which never approached the speed I could complete a paper chart). This is, to me, the ultimate frustration of the EHR (eternal headache rouser).

When using these records, I have found myself incapable of completing the records during the patient's office visit. Many nights I would be awake, when the family had long gone to bed, struggling to complete the records for the day using these systems. After a while I noticed the stacks of incomplete notes growing because I couldn't keep up.

Thinking maybe it was just me suffering from such frustrations, I inquired from other physicians about their experience. I concluded that the majority of these practitioners were having the same exact difficulties. How did we get ourselves into this predicament? Did we embrace this electronic medical record too soon? In my current practice we have yet to transition to EHR, and I have to admit that

I don't miss it. I also understand, however, under current federal law my current practice and all practices will eventually be **forced** to buy an EHR.

The medical assistant at my PCP's office was able to take my basic information and vitals and input it into the record without difficulty. Also my laboratory tests that were drawn the day before had automatically populated my record. That was cool. I started to think that maybe my doctor had found a system out there that was now more efficient and seamless. So when my physician and I had concluded my health related business, I told him I admired his paperless office. It appeared so uncluttered. I told him it must be nice to have an EHR that works so well. It was all an illusion. He told me he had been up until 1:00 am that morning trying to input all the information from his office visits the day before. He said because of the EHR he was seeing 10% less patients on average than when he was using paper charts because the system was so much less efficient. He was just as frustrated as the rest of us with EHR. His workload was greater, and his income was less. So much for the benefit of an EHR.

The fact of the matter is we have all been misguided and misinformed. Although, there are clear advantages to EHRs, and I think ultimately these advantages may outweigh the disadvantages; these systems are currently a drag on us and our practices. Current systems fail to accomplish what they are advertised to do which is to make our practices more efficient and time saving. I believe mandating this technology until it is improved upon is a no win situation for all of us, patients and physicians alike. Oh... I almost forgot. Remember "meaningful use". Good luck with that. Maybe it's time to write our representatives and protest this mandate. Let us know your thoughts and experiences.

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**Bruce J. Applebaum, M.D.**  
**President, El Paso County Medical Society**

### **Retraction**

The following information was omitted from the previous issue of the El Paso Physician magazine.

Dr. Rios participates in the TMA Educational Loan Applications for Medical Students.

Dr. Palafox is a member of the Admissions Committee for Paul L. Foster School of Medicine.

