Views and attitudes towards technological innovation in general practice

Survey report 2016
Views and attitudes towards technological innovation in general practice: Survey report 2016

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We recognise the traditional custodians of the land and sea on which we work and live.
About the RACGP Expert Committee

eHealth and Practice Systems

The RACGP Expert Committee – eHealth and Practice Systems (REC–eHPS) supports the provision of healthcare through technology by providing general practice with guidance and resources that improve practice and communication efficiencies. The committee's advocacy work has ensured that elements of e-Health are reasonable, workable and useful for general practice.

Additional PDF copies of this report can be downloaded from www.racgp.org.au/your-practice/ehealth
About this survey

The challenges facing general practitioners (GPs) and general practice are complex and rapidly evolving. There is increasing pressure to provide care for more patients while keeping pace with ever-changing medical advances and government regulations. There are also opportunities; developments in information and communications technology are creating more effective and efficient ways to connect patients, clinicians and providers.

As the peak professional body for GPs, The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) is committed to supporting general practice to provide high-quality clinical care. This annual survey provides an insight about the issues that matter most to you and your practice.

In October 2016, the RACGP released its annual survey to explore the views and attitudes on the use of technology in general practice. A 10-minute online survey was distributed to GPs across Australia. In total, 1718 GPs participated in the survey, and 1200 responses were considered for analysis.

Our survey indicates that GPs remain optimistic about the use of eHealth technology and its ability to improve productivity and care coordination. Recent graduates (75%), followed by GPs practising for 10 years or more (60%), feel most comfortable about experimenting with emerging technologies.

Information technology (IT) systems and practice processes, and issues related to patient confidentiality and privacy are still the key barriers to GPs’ eHealth adoption. Learning and development activities remain the key facilitators to the uptake of technology in general practice.

In order to increase uptake of mobile technologies, general practice requires guidance on how to address the barriers related to systems integration. Additionally, GPs need support to understand the relevance of mobile technologies in clinical practice and workflow.

We thank all participants for taking part in the survey and welcome further feedback and comments to ehealth@racgp.org.au. The RACGP hopes the results provide a stimulus to discuss increased adoption of digital technologies in general practice while achieving the best health outcomes for patients.

Dr Nathan Pinskier
Chair
RACGP Expert Committee – eHealth and Practice Systems
Survey design

This exploratory survey aimed to understand the use of eHealth technologies by GPs. Specifically, the survey explored:

- knowledge of eHealth technologies
- experience using eHealth technologies in patient-related work
- barriers and facilitators for the adoption of eHealth technologies
- education and training needs.

Methods
This survey used a descriptive, quantitative design. A 10-minute online survey was developed based on existing literature and refined by pilot testing with members of the RACGP Expert Committee – eHealth and Practice Systems (REC–eHPS) to verify content validity. For the purpose of the survey, the REC–eHPS investigated:

- types of eHealth technologies currently being used and of future interest
- perceived barriers and facilitators
- learning and development opportunities.

The survey was initially advertised at the RACGP’s 2016 conference for general practice (GP16) in Perth, followed by a social media campaign (using Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn), and via the RACGP’s member newsletters. Participants were invited through key organisations that promoted the online survey link among their members, including peak professional bodies, Primary Health Networks (PHNs) and universities. Quantitative data were analysed using Microsoft Excel, and themes from open-ended questions were described.
Summary of findings

GPs see many opportunities with advances in eHealth

Highest rates of satisfaction

71% of GPs were satisfied with the way they used technology in patient-related work in 2016, compared with 67% in 2015.

65% of GPs have internet access.

43% of GPs with 10 or more years of practice.

GPs believe eHealth helps to improve

- Collaboration with other healthcare providers
- Continuity of care
- Care delivery
- Patient engagement in managing their own health

Access to digital health tools

In their consulting room

98% of GPs have access to a desktop computer.

65% of GPs feel confident about experimenting with new technologies.

89% of GPs have internet access.

Confident
completely comfortable with new technologies

75%

Not confident
need more direction with new technologies

36%

75%

60%

of new graduates

of GPs with 20–30 years of experience

of GPs with 5–20 years of experience
GP use of technology in practice

GPs see many opportunities for use of technology in clinical practice

Generating more electronic referrals

Using patient data in real-time clinical decisions

Communicating more effectively with other healthcare providers

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Generating more electronic referrals

Using patient data in real-time clinical decisions

Communicating more effectively with other healthcare providers

Barriers to adoption

Security concerns

Lack of training

Lack of understanding about benefits

In addition to using clinical information systems for managing patient health records, GPs are also using them for quality control activities such as generating medication charts for nursing homes and identifying gaps in services.

Top use of technology tools

Speaking with patients on the phone

Providing registration forms on practice website

Sending text message reminders of appointments

Offering to book appointments online

GPs would like to see

Greater use of secure message delivery by hospitals, other medical specialists and allied health professionals

Greater interoperability between secure message delivery providers

GPs want to use technology more

For patient education

To improve collection of patient data

For clinical decision making
GPs’ views of mobile technologies

Most recommended health app categories
- Mental health
- Fitness
- Nutrition
- Women’s reproductive health

Barriers to mobile technology adoption
- Lack of perceived needs
- Lack of access to mobile devices
- Lack of practice incentives

Information GPs would like to access from their mobile devices
- Encrypted peer-to-peer messaging
- Clinical test results
- Electronic medical records
- Drug references

45% of GPs use mobile devices (smartphone/tablet) for patient-related work

2/3 of GPs recommend health apps to their patients

Barriers to recommendations of health apps
- Lack of knowledge about effective apps
- Being unsure about benefits to patient outcomes
- Lack of patient digital literacy
- Communication with practice when offsite
- Taking clinical images
- Accessing medical apps (calculators, guidelines, drug references)
- Engaging in patient education

Barriers to mobile technology adoption
- Lack of perceived needs
- Lack of access to mobile devices
- Lack of practice incentives
GP use of social media

ONLY 1 in 5 GPs use social media for work purposes

Perceived barriers for social media uptake

Security concerns  Breach of confidentiality  Time-consuming nature of social media management  Impact on patient–doctor boundaries

Technology adoption

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENABLERS</th>
<th>BARRIERS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>Lack of integration with IT systems</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation in conferences and seminars</td>
<td>Lack of funding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge sharing with colleagues</td>
<td>Issues related to patient confidentiality and privacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role modelling from practice manager</td>
<td>Lack of integration with current processes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Availability of technology in the practice</td>
<td>Implementation costs</td>
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3 in 10 GPs use telehealth services, mostly for:
- conducting video consultations with other healthcare practitioners
- undertaking training

If funding was available, 65% of GPs would be likely to use telehealth services in the next three years.

GP use of social media

1 in 5 GPs use social media for work purposes
Implications for policy and practice

GPs continue to remain optimistic about the use of eHealth technologies and about their prospects for improving productivity and coordination of care.

The RACGP will continue to engage in an ongoing dialogue with GPs to explore their knowledge and attitudes in relation to eHealth technologies, so that guidelines and policies can be developed to support GPs in integrating technology in their practice.

**RACGP eHealth resources**

- Digital Business Kits (DBK) – provide a suite of resources and general guidance to promote the adoption and meaningful use of technologies in general practice.

- mHealth in general practice – A toolkit for effective and secure use of mobile technology – provides information and instructions for anyone considering incorporating mobile technology into general practice.

- Guide for the use of social media in general practice – provides information on social media advantages and disadvantages, risks and benefits, online conduct, security, privacy requirements, advertising and testimonials and the use of disclaimers.

- A guide for hardware and software requirements in general practice – assists general practices in choosing what type of IT requirements they need for their business.
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