

Joan Henderson  
Allan Pollack  
Julie Gordon  
Graeme Miller

# Technology in practice – GP computer use by age

**Keywords**

communication, doctor–patient relations; general practice; medical informatics



Since 2005, more than 95% of general practitioners (GPs) have had access to computers in their clinical work.<sup>1</sup> We have analysed the most recent 2 years of BEACH data (April 2012–March 2014) to determine whether GP age affects clinical computer use.

Of 1937 BEACH GP participants for whom age was known, 62% were aged 50 years or more. This reflects the distribution of GPs in that age group in the Australian sample frame.<sup>2</sup> Although computer use was very common in both age groups, there were significant differences between them. Older GPs were less likely to use a computer for clinical activity than their younger counterparts. Older GPs were also significantly more likely to use paper records alone for patient clinical information, and to produce hand-written scripts only. The majority of both groups used the internet in their clinical practice, although internet use was significantly more common in GPs aged less than 50 years than in those 50 years or more (Figure 1).

GP age significantly affects their computer use. It is reasonable to assume that GPs’ professional and personal interaction with technology varies with their familiarity with computers. Younger GPs exposed to technology from a much younger age may be more comfortable with computers and other devices.

While the majority of both age groups reported having only electronic health records (EHRs; ie paperless), we do not know the proportions of GPs who enter full clinical information into their software, and the proportions

of those who scan and attach information<sup>3</sup> such as discharge summaries, pathology and/or imaging results, and other correspondence emailed or posted from care providers external to the practice. In the future, we will expand the GP profile questionnaire completed by BEACH GP participants to include more specific questions around EHR use to answer these questions.

**Authors**

Joan Henderson, Allan Pollack, Julie Gordon, Graeme Miller. Family Medicine Research Centre, University of Sydney, NSW

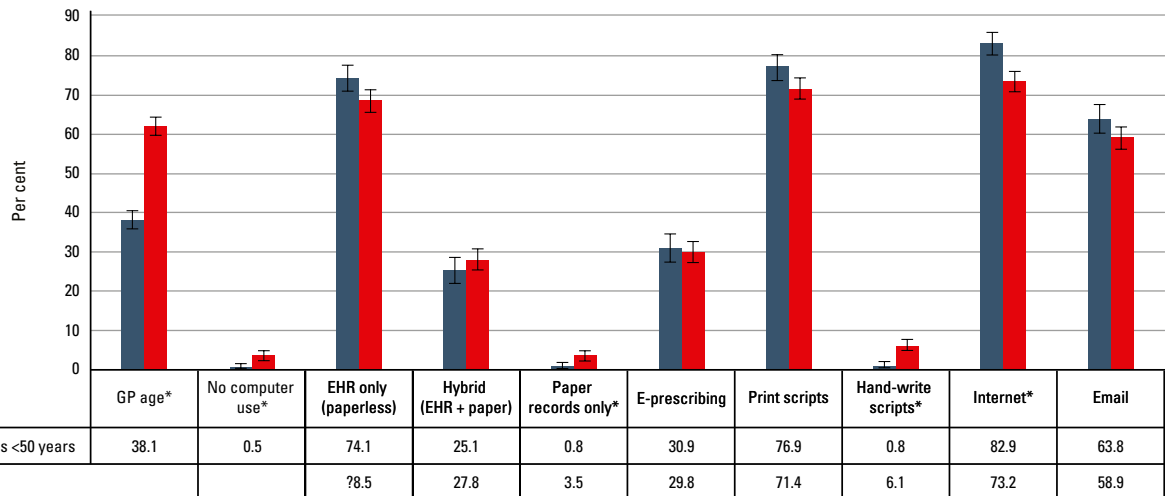
**References**

- Henderson J, Britt H, Miller G. Extent and utilisation of computerisation in Australian general practice. *Med J Aust* 2006;185:84–87.
- Britt H, Miller GC, Henderson J, et al. General practice activity in Australia 2013–14. General practice series no. 36. Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2014.
- Otto K. Barriers to PCEHR uptake on the frontline. *Pulse+IT* 2014;41:8–11.

**Acknowledgements**

The authors thank the GP participants in the BEACH program and all members of the BEACH team. Financial contributors to BEACH 2012–2014: Australian Government Department of Health; Australian Government Department of Veterans’ Affairs; AstraZeneca Pty Ltd (Australia); bioCSL Pty Ltd; Merck, Sharp and Dohme (Australia) Pty Ltd; National Prescribing Service Ltd; Novartis Pharmaceuticals Australia Pty Ltd; Pfizer Australia Pty Ltd.

Figure 1.



Note: Missing data removed; \*significant differences; EHR, electronic health record

GP computer use 2012–2014 (95% CI)