

Why some providers remain wary

By Jeff Rowe, Editor

It seems safe to say that hardly anyone hasn't experienced the downside of the "convenience" of modern technology.

You lose precious time in the office because your computer, or perhaps the company's entire system, locks up. You're on the phone with a supplier who apologizes and asks you to call back because, well, their system is locked up. You go to an ATM machine to get some cash, only to leave empty-handed because "the system is temporarily off-line."

Along with the cost of implementation and the usual suspects such as still-fuzzy meaningful use standards and interoperability issues, the potential inconvenience of supposedly convenience- and efficiency-inducing technology appears to be another reason why some healthcare providers are viewing the implementation of electronic health records with a wary eye.

Indeed, according to this industry insider, it may be the main reason "why so many physicians viewers resist going 'electronic'". In his view, already-busy doctors are not inclined to look sympathetically on implementing new technologies into their practices if they can't be assured that those technologies will fit quickly and seamlessly into their workflow.

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As in other areas of modern life, there's always a learning curve with new technologies and, yes, machines do occasionally perform at less-than-optimal level. But that doesn't negate the significant efficiencies that new technologies generally provide.

Nonetheless, policymakers should at least be aware that some of the reasons for the reluctance of healthcare providers to jump into the electronic pool will not necessarily be solved by one government program or another.

Ideally, this is an opportunity for vendors to step in with training programs and other tools that will assure providers they'll be able to hit the ground running once they make the commitment. In the meantime, however, chances are that many of them are going to continue to watch and wait.