

## FACT SHEET

August 26, 2015

**Health Information Technology**

“Health Information Technology” or Health IT encompasses a wide range of hardware and software products used by patients, doctors, pharmacies, hospitals, insurers or other participants in the healthcare ecosystem to process and store data and communications related to health care. Any aspects of health care, from accounting and billing to diagnostics and treatment, may be involved. Examples include Electronic health records (EHR), which give providers immediate access to patient records and create a long-term record of care, Picture Archiving and Communications Systems (PACS), to store and process diagnostic images such as X-rays, bar coding and Radio Frequency Identification Tags, and diagnostic software that can alert doctors to medical research relevant to particular patients. Health IT is of great interest to policymakers and firms because of its potential to reduce health care costs, and improve the quality of care, reducing costly and harmful errors. With these goals in mind, the [American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009](#) included funding for health information technology.

**Overview****These issues arise in discussions of health information technology:**

- How health IT helps improve the quality of care and reduce medical errors.
- Whether and how health IT reduces the cost of care overall, or helps avoid costly errors.
- The reasons that medical care providers have been slow to adopt new health IT, and how to encourage them to adopt health IT more quickly.
- The benefits to patients from pooling or sharing of medical information for research, product development, or marketing.
- The link between the cost of medical care and the cost of adopting new and sometimes expensive technology, including health IT.
- The privacy and security of health IT, particularly health IT used to manage patient records.
- The impact of privacy regulation on the adoption of IT by health care providers.
- The impact of communications regulation such as net neutrality on the rollout of health IT.
- Implementation of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, or HIPAA.
- Whether health IT systems are interoperable, so that systems maintained by different firms can work together and exchange information (for more, see TAP’s [Interoperability Fact Sheet](#)).
- Whether health IT qualifies for meaningful use certification under the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health Act.

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*For media inquiries on a range of TAP topics, or for assistance facilitating interviews between reporters and academics, contact [TAP@techpolicy.com](mailto:TAP@techpolicy.com).*

## Health Information Technology Sources

These sources are a good place to start in understanding health IT issues.

[Jonathan Levin's](#) article "[Why Hasn't IT Transformed U.S. Health Care? And Will It?](#)" discusses the role that information technology is expected to play in health care.

[James Rebitzer](#), Mari Rege, and Christopher Shepard study how information technology can help physicians efficiently acquire new knowledge in a clinical setting in "[Influence, Information Overload and Information Technology in Health Care.](#)" In "[Information Technology and Medical Missteps: Evidence from a Randomized Trial,](#)" Professor Rebitzer, Jonathan Javitt, and Lonny Reisman found that technology-based decision support can reduce health care costs.

[Jonathan Zittrain](#) asks how technology can help protect the privacy of patient records in "[What the Publisher Can Teach the Patient: Intellectual Property and Privacy in an Era of Trusted Privication.](#)" [Frank Pasquale's](#) blog "[Health Privacy Paradigm Shift: From Consent to Reciprocal Transparency](#)" discusses health IT and medical privacy concerns. Finally, in "[There is a Time to Keep Silent and a Time to Speak, the Hard Part is Knowing Which is Which: Striking the Balance between Privacy Protection and the Flow of Health Care Information,](#)" Daniel J. Gilman and James C. Cooper, both of the Federal Trade Commission, explore policy trade-offs between health information technology and regulation of privacy and data security.

"It's a little embarrassing, a little awkward, a little sensitive to have every aspect of one's self revealed to other people when one is in pain, when one doesn't look one's best, sound one's best." [Anita Allen](#) from [NPR Morning Edition](#), January 18, 2011

"Whenever health data is fed into an evaluative profile of an individual, there should be safeguards in place to assure that the data is accurate, and that the resulting profile is, if at all possible, not used to harm or disadvantage the individual." [Frank Pasquale](#) from [Concurring Opinions](#) blog, October 26, 2010

Please note that all links on this fact sheet are accessible from the online version at [www.techpolicy.com/HealthIT.aspx](http://www.techpolicy.com/HealthIT.aspx).

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