CEO George Halvorson, EHR Leader, to Retire; Bernard Tyson to Take the Helm

George Halvorson, chairman and chief executive officer of Kaiser Permanente, announced that he will retire in December 2013. Current President and Chief Operating Officer Bernard Tyson will succeed Halvorson as chairman and CEO at the end of next year, following a six-month transition period. Halvorson has served as chairman and CEO since 2002. Under his leadership, Kaiser Permanente has grown to serve more than 9 million members, pioneered EHRs, and become a model for the future of health care. Kaiser Permanente’s board of directors says 52-year-old Tyson has demonstrated excellent leadership and vision during his 28 years with the health care organization.

Study Says EHRs Improve Diabetes Patient Outcomes

A recent Kaiser Permanente study found that physicians who use electronic health records are more likely than those who don’t to identify diabetic patients who need more intense drug treatment. Health information technology also was linked to better management of disease risk factors and greater improvements among patients with poor control of their diabetes and high lipid levels.

The study, which appeared in October in the Annals of Internal Medicine, was conducted from 2004 to 2009 and included 169,711 patients with diabetes at 17 medical centers in Northern California.

New Partnership with Rock Health Supports Health IT

Kaiser Permanente and nonprofit startup accelerator Rock Health announced a partnership to help entrepreneurs and experts advance digital solutions in health care.

Research Roundup

KP HealthConnect® Now Recording Exercise Habits

Kaiser Permanente is one of the first health care organizations to establish a systematic method for recording patients’ physical activity into their EHRs. In response to the Exercise is Medicine™ initiative, Kaiser Permanente Southern California is incorporating questions about exercise into records, alongside measurements of traditional vital signs, such as blood pressure, pulse, temperature, and respiration. According to a study published in Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise, including an “exercise vital sign” section in patients’ EHRs helps doctors better treat and counsel patients about their lifestyle.

Robots Improve Rehab for Stroke Patients

A University of Calgary study found that robots could be more accurate than medical experts when it comes to helping stroke patients on the road to recovery. Researchers report that rehabilitation robots can help improve detection of post-stroke impairments and can enhance the type and intensity of therapy needed for recovery. According to the study, tests using a robot better measure the limb position and limb movement of patients than tests done by humans. In the past, experts have relied on their judgment and subjective rating scales to assess impairment after stroke.

Kaiser Permanente Research Collaboration Wins National Designation as Evidence-Based
Kaiser Permanente will work closely with Rock Health’s network of startups, thought leaders, and researchers across the U.S. to help guide them toward more effective and convenient health management through advanced digital technology.

**Thrive Campaign Ad Highlights Value of KP HealthConnect**

Kaiser Permanente is demonstrating the potentially life-saving benefits of proactive care in a television ad – the latest addition to its Thrive advertising campaign.

The commercial, titled “A Day in the Life – Mary Gonzales,” tells the story of a Kaiser Permanente member who visited her doctor because of a cold, but received a mammogram after the health care organization’s EHR, Kaiser Permanente HealthConnect, alerted the receptionist that the preventive procedure was overdue. Gonzales ultimately underwent successful breast cancer surgery after the mammogram detected a lump.

This and other TV ads can be viewed on Kaiser Permanente’s YouTube channel.

**Hot off the Press**

**Health IT Staff Shortages a Growing Concern for Health Care CIOs**

A survey of chief information officers found that more than two-thirds are reporting staff shortages, and more than half believe this will affect their chances of qualifying for federal incentive payments.

According to the survey by the College of Healthcare Information Management Executives, 67 percent of hospitals and health organizations face a shortage of health IT staff – up from 59 percent in 2010. The results indicate that many facilities across the U.S. are struggling to hire and retain employees to work on EHR projects.

**Practice Center**

A new research collaboration led by Kaiser Permanente has received a prestigious designation from the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality to serve as one of the nation’s 11 Evidence-Based Practice Centers. The EPCs produce evidence reviews on behalf of programs such as AHRQ’s Effective Health Care Program, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, and the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force.

The new collaboration, called Kaiser Permanente Research Affiliates, involves nearly 80 researchers from three integrated health care delivery systems, including Kaiser Permanente, Group Health Cooperative, and HealthPartners. Kaiser Permanente Research Affiliates is headquartered in Portland, Ore., and is directed by Evelyn P. Whitlock, MD, MPH.

**More Doctors Using Social Media for Work, Study Finds**

A study published in the Journal of Medical Internet Research found that doctors are increasingly embracing social media to search for medical information and share or exchange it with other physicians. Out of 485 oncologists and primary care physicians, 24.1 percent said they use social media in a professional capacity every day, and 57.9 percent said it enabled them to care for patients more effectively. Researchers say using Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to engage with patients and colleagues can positively affect physicians’ continuing professional development.

**Researchers Look to Social Media for Info on Drug Safety**

A new study showed social media could be used to identify early signs of adverse drug reactions. Researchers at the University of Virginia and West Virginia University are using data analysis tools to explore how tens of thousands of pharmaceutical-related comments shared on Web forums, blogs, and other social networking sites can be harnessed as an early warning signal of adverse drug reactions.

The FDA relies on consumers to report adverse side effects through physicians and other official reporting channels. Researchers say social media can be a reliable and timely resource to collect product safety feedback.

**Health IT Improving Hospital Quality**

Researchers at Boston University say health IT can help
establish health information exchanges, and plan for ICD-10 diagnostic code set conversion.

Twitter App Tracks Health Concerns in Real Time

A free Web-based application is helping public health officials track illnesses in their communities in real time using Twitter. MappyHealth mines Twitter data to look for trends in health terms used in Tweets to help predict disease outbreaks through various mapping and analytics tools. The app was developed in response to a request made by local health officials to HHS to develop a Web-based tool that could make social media monitoring more accessible to local health departments. MappyHealth is available to state, local, territorial, and tribal health agencies.

Coordinated Efforts Needed for IT in Behavioral Health

The adoption of health IT will greatly benefit behavioral health providers, according to a report by the Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT. The report summarizes discussions from a roundtable this past summer, which included consumers, payers, health IT vendors, and other stakeholders.

With behavioral health providers currently ineligible for Meaningful Use financial incentives, roundtable participants pressed the ONC for technical assistance in implementing and using health IT. They also called for a redesign of EHRs, since current systems contain many features that don’t apply to behavioral health. The talks emphasized the importance of public-private partnerships and collaboration of federal initiatives to address the disparate adoption and use of health IT in behavioral health care settings. The ONC is evaluating the various recommendations.

Doing Data Sharing Right

The Department of Veterans Affairs and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration within the Department of Health and Human Services partnered earlier this year to demonstrate how to securely share sensitive health information via EHRs.

Teams demonstrated how to safely and securely transmit a consenting mock patient’s substance-abuse-treatment records tagged with privacy metadata from one EHR to a different EHR system. The ONC said the project exemplified how existing privacy laws and policies can be implemented effectively in an electronic environment when hospitals focus on quality care improvement, reduce mortality rates, and boost patient satisfaction. They say health IT enables quality practices and clinical strategies through better communication, documentation, information sharing, performance monitoring, and error prevention.

Researchers considered the combined impact of several technologies, including EHRs, medication management systems, and radio frequency identification technology. Previous studies have often evaluated a single technology at one time, and showed little health IT impact on quality. The findings of the provisional study, which is published in the journal BMC Medical Informatics and Decision Making, are based on data from a survey of 401 hospitals in the United States.

Patients Who Read Doctor Notes Feel More in Control of Their Health

A study in the Annals of Internal Medicine found that primary care physicians who shared their clinical notes with patients helped those patients better understand medical issues and gave them a greater sense of control over their health care than those who did not share notes. The year-long study involved 105 primary care physicians and 13,564 volunteer patients who were given access to their doctors’ notes via electronic links to secure Internet portals. Furthermore, allowing patients to read notes rarely caused confusion, unnecessary anxiety, or longer office visits. Authors of the study said the open-note system built trust and strengthened relationships between doctors and patients.

IOM Calls for Public Comparisons of EHR Usability

The health IT community should allow reviews and comparisons of EHR products if it wants to avoid formal regulation by the FDA, according to a discussion paper from the Institute of Medicine.

Authors of the paper say EHRs have not advanced sufficiently; nor have they been adopted as widely as other consumer products, such as smartphones and tablets – a problem that has stifled the evolution of this technology. The IOM group recommended subdividing EHR ratings, allowing health care providers to compare only the products they need. Developing meaningful metrics for comparing user experiences will not only help providers choose a product, but will also help drive product improvement, according to the paper.

Health IT Happenings
proper standards are in place.

The demonstration, announced in September, was developed as part of the Data Segmentation for Privacy (DS4P) Initiative.

Feds Push for Wider Use of “Blue Button” Web Applet

Millions more Americans will soon be able to download their EHRs by clicking on a simple “blue button” on health care provider and insurance company websites. The technology enables users to download a summary of their treatment, check for errors, and print and share their information. Developed by the VA in 2010 for its MyHealtheVet patient portal, the technology has since been adopted by the Defense Department, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, and the Social Security Administration. The Automated Blue Button Initiative, backed by the VA and the ONC, aims to extend this functionality to the private sector.

For more information, or to send to a colleague, please contact e-quality@kp.org.