

Use Of Electronic Health Records Can Improve The Health Care Industry's Environmental Footprint

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Abstract

Electronic health records have the potential to improve the environmental footprint of the health care industry. We estimate that Kaiser Permanente's electronic health record system, which covers 8.7 million beneficiaries, eliminated 1,000 tons of paper records and 68 tons of x-ray film, and that it has lowered gasoline consumption among patients who otherwise would have made trips to the doctor by at least three million gallons per year. However, the use of personal computers resulted in higher energy consumption and generated an additional 250 tons of waste. We conclude that electronic health records have a positive net effect on the environment, and that our model for evaluating their impact can be used to determine whether their use can improve communities' health.