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## International Survey Shows U.S. Lags in Access, Quality, Use of Health IT

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Recognizing that strong primary care is the cornerstone of a high-functioning health care system, countries across the globe are making efforts to bolster their primary care systems by investing in information technology, round-the-clock access, and quality improvement, while simultaneously reforming delivery systems and payment policies. But a new [Commonwealth Fund survey](#) of primary care physicians in 11 countries reveals that the United States lags far behind its peers in key measures of access, quality, and use of health IT—undermining doctors' efforts to provide timely, high-quality care.

### **A Survey of Primary Care Physicians in 11 Countries, 2009: Perspectives on Care, Costs, and Experiences**

Cathy Schoen, M.A., Robin Osborn, M.B.A., Michelle M. Doty, Ph.D., David Squires, Jordon Peugh, M.A., and Sandra Applebaum  
November 5, 2009  
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Results of the survey, published today by *Health Affairs* in an online article, show that:

- More than half (58%) of U.S. physicians—by far the most of any country surveyed—said their patients often have difficulty paying for medications and care. Half said they and their staff spend substantial time dealing with the restrictions insurance companies place on patients' care.
- Just 29 percent of U.S. doctors said their practices have provisions for after-hours care, allowing patients to see a doctor or nurse without going to emergency departments. In contrast, nearly all Dutch doctors and nine of 10 New Zealand and U.K. practices reported such arrangements.
- U.S. doctors are far less likely to use health IT that helps reduce errors and improve care. Only 46 percent use electronic medical records, compared with over 90 percent of doctors in Australia, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.
- While all the countries surveyed use financial incentives to improve the quality of care, primary care physicians in the U.S. are among the least likely to be offered such rewards. Only one-third

reported receiving financial incentives.

Many of these gaps would be addressed by proposed health reform legislation under consideration in Congress. "Our weak primary care system puts patients at risk and results in poorer health outcomes and higher costs," says Commonwealth Fund president Karen Davis. "The survey provides yet another reminder of the urgent need for reforms that make accessible, high-quality primary care a national priority."

Be sure to visit the new **Commonwealth Fund International Health Policy and Data Center** at <http://www.commonwealthfund.org/Topics/International-Health-Policy-2009.aspx>, where you can browse content by country or topic and create custom tables and charts using data from our international health policy surveys from 2006 to 2009.

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