**Survey Finds Americans Want Electronic Personal Health Information
to Improve Own Health Care**

November 2006

Lake Research Partners (LRP) and American Viewpoint conducted a survey among 1,003 Americans nationwide, November 11 – 15, 2006, for the Markle Foundation. The survey examined public opinion toward electronic personal health records, including consumers' level of interest, the benefits of and concerns about online health information, and the role of the government in encouraging health information exchange networks and establishing privacy protections. This survey was done in preparation for the Markle Foundation's conference, *Connecting Americans to Their Health Care: Empowered Consumers, Personal Health Records and Emerging Technologies,* occurring December 7-8, 2006 in Washington, D.C.

Survey results reveal a few key attitudinal themes regarding electronic personal health information. First, Americans want access to their personal health information electronically because they believe that the online services enabled by such access is likely to increase their quality of care. Additionally, the public sees online records as a way to increase health care efficiency by reducing unnecessary and repeated tests and procedures. A desire for more control over their health care also seems to be behind the public's interest in electronic personal health information. However, identity theft and privacy risks are still top concerns for the public, and they believe there is a role for government to play in ensuring the security of electronic personal health information. Specific findings include:

- Two-thirds of the public (65%) is interested in accessing their own personal health information electronically. This interest spans demographic groups – with a majority (53%) of Americans 60 and older and high proportions of minority groups, including African-Americans and Latinos, expressing interest.

- Large majorities see a number of benefits of accessing information online, which could lead to a reduction in health care costs. For example, nearly nine in 10 Americans (88%) say online records would be important in reducing the number of unnecessary or repeated tests and procedures they undergo.

- Americans express strong concern that their information may be used for purposes other than their own care. Eight in 10 Americans (80%) say they are very concerned about identity theft or fraud or the possibility of their information getting into the hands of marketers (77%).

- Americans believe they could gain more control over their health care by using electronic personal health records. For example, ninety percent say it would be personally important to track their symptoms or changes in health care online.
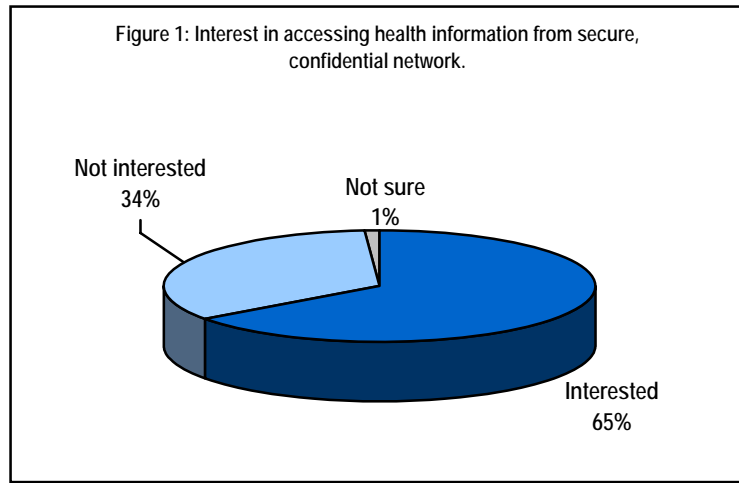
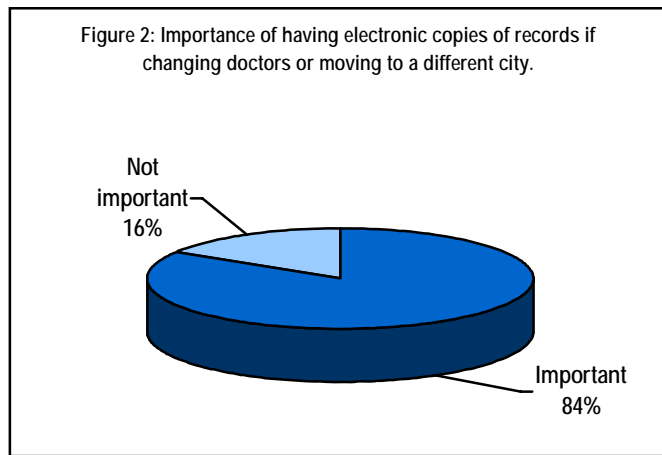Details about these findings can be found on the following pages.

Findings

The vast majority of Americans wants access to their medical records, and two-thirds are interested in accessing those records online.

Nine in 10 Americans (89%) would want to look over their medical records if they could, and two-thirds (65%) are interested in accessing records online. Segments of the public most likely to express interest include Americans under 40 (72%), those who use the Internet daily (71%), and parents (70%).

Figure 1: Interest in accessing health information from secure, confidential network.

Not interested 34%

Not sure 1%

Interested 65%

While younger Americans are most likely to express interest, more than half of those 60 and older (53%) are interested in accessing their health information online.

When given the scenario of changing doctors or moving to a different city, an even greater majority – 84 percent – said it would be important for them to have electronic copies of their medical records that they keep and control.

Figure 2: Importance of having electronic copies of records if changing doctors or moving to a different city.

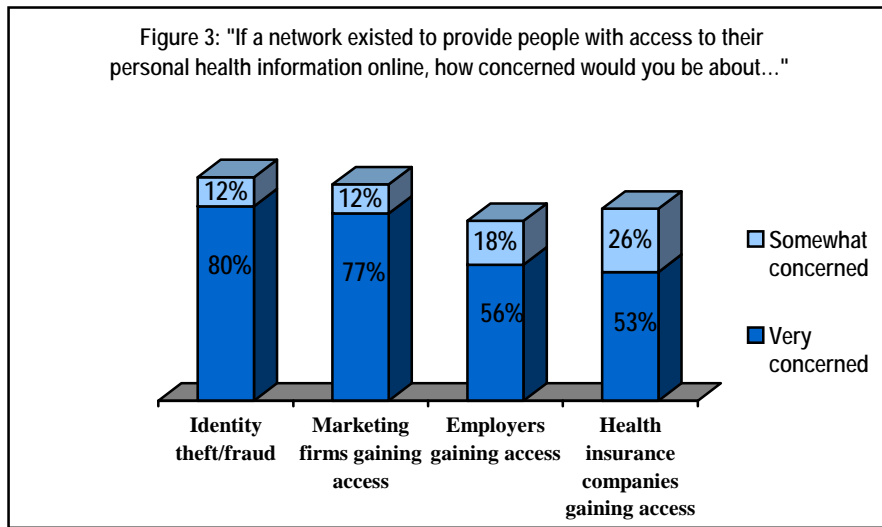Not important 16%

Important 84%

The public feels that access to electronic personal health records would have a number of personal benefits that could improve quality of care, such as improving doctor-patient communication, avoiding medical errors, and reducing repeated tests and procedures.

Ninety-one percent of the public says it would be important to access electronic personal health records to see what their doctors write down to ensure that providers understand their personal situation. More than eight in 10 Americans (84%) would be interested in accessing their electronic records to check for mistakes – and even higher proportions of African Americans and Latinos expressed this concern. Eighty-eight percent also says that accessing records would be important to reduce the number of repeated tests and procedures they undergo. In all of these areas, Americans who use health care most often are among the most likely to say these are important benefits of electronic health records.

Americans' top concern about electronic personal health records is potential misuse of their personal data.

While Americans see many benefits of electronic personal health information, they express concern that such information would be used for purposes other than their own care. Eight in 10 Americans (80%) say they are very concerned about identity theft or fraud, and this is particularly worrisome for those in fair or poor health (87%). A large proportion of the
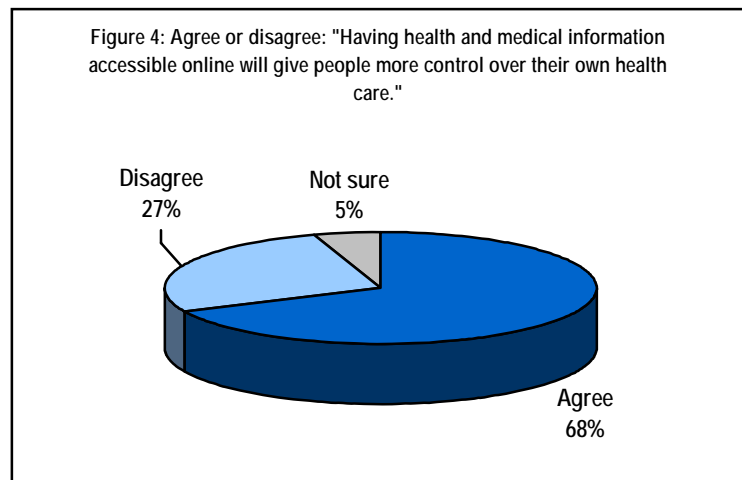
public (77%) is very concerned about information getting into the hands of marketers. Americans are also very concerned about employers (56%) and health insurers (53%) gaining access to their information.

Figure 3: "If a network existed to provide people with access to their personal health information online, how concerned would you be about…"

- 12% Somewhat concerned / 80% Very concerned — Identity theft/fraud
- 12% Somewhat concerned / 77% Very concerned — Marketing firms gaining access
- 18% Somewhat concerned / 56% Very concerned — Employers gaining access
- 26% Somewhat concerned / 53% Very concerned — Health insurance companies gaining access

Large majorities see electronic personal health records as a way to gain more control over their own health care and become more engaged.

More than two-thirds of the public (68%) says having health and medical information accessible online will give people more control, and one in four Americans (27%) feels they have too little control over making decisions about their health care today.

Indeed, the public sees a number of ways in which they would engage in managing their health care if they could access their information online. Nine in 10 Americans (90%) say tracking their symptoms or changes in health over a secure online health information network

Figure 4: Agree or disagree: "Having health and medical information accessible online will give people more control over their own health care."

Disagree 27%
Not sure 5%
Agree 68%

would be very important. A majority of parents (82%) would be interested in keeping track of their children's health records and services, like immunization dates. Eighty percent of the public would be interested in managing the financial aspects of their health care, such as tracking insurance payments and out-of-pocket costs.

The government has a role in protecting the privacy and confidentiality of electronic personal health information.

Majorities say the government has a role in establishing rules and protections regarding the use of electronic health information. Three-quarters of the public say the government has a role in establishing rules to protect the privacy and confidentiality of online health information, and two-thirds say the government has a role in setting rules to control the secondary use of information.

The public supports use of their electronic personal health information for purposes other than their treatment, with appropriate safeguards.

A majority of Americans would be willing to share their information with their identity protected for a number of uses, including sharing information with public health officials to detect disease outbreaks (73%) or bio-terrorist attacks (58%), with researchers, doctors, and hospitals to learn how to improve quality of care (72%), and with appropriate officials to detect medical fraud (71%). However, when asked, most Americans say they want to have some control over the use of their information for these purposes.

Conclusions

These survey results indicate most Americans are interested in accessing personal health information electronically and in ensuring that their health care providers have access to their information. Majorities express strong interest in using electronic personal health information to engage more and have more control over their care, which could affect both the quality of care they receive and the overall cost of health care. Yet, data suggest this interest is contingent on the extent to which the government and others establish sufficient privacy and confidentiality protections.