

# AMR

## ERM Industry Trends - Kaiser



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Kaiser HMO has implemented digital imaging to cut operating costs and improve patient care. America's largest non-profit health insurer is computerizing all of its patient records.

Worried that medication prescribed by a Kaiser Permanente emergency-room doctor in Baldwin Park wasn't helping her chronic asthma, Andrea Edwards went to see her regular physician.

Dr. Kevin Rossi, whose office is 15 miles away in Kaiser's Downey clinic, ordinarily might have ordered X-rays or stronger medication. But because Kaiser has begun to put many patient records into a system wide database, he was able to discover that Edwards had been prescribed cough syrup and an antibiotic, not the prednisone she thought she was taking.

"I was able to get out of there in 30 minutes — with the right medicines," said Edwards, 20. "I could see my records. Having them be available electronically makes it easier for all the doctors I have to coordinate my care."

Eventually all of Kaiser's 8.3 million members nationwide will find their records available electronically. Nowhere is the conversion moving more aggressively than in Southern California, where a new leader has made the project a priority.

Three months ago, Dr. Benjamin Chu, 52, became president of Kaiser's Southern California region, which serves 3.1 million members with a budget of more than \$11 billion and runs 11 medical centers from Bakersfield to San Diego.

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Among Chu's qualifications: he headed New York City's Health & Hospitals Corp., a public system serving 1.3 million patients that made the switch to computerized records on his watch.

Chu said that Kaiser's unique integrated model attracted him to his new job. "We're not just an HMO plan, we're a provider as well," he said. "That's a powerful model."

As a result, he said, "All the pieces are here," not only for computerizing records, but for using that system to cut costs and improve care.

Oakland-based Kaiser Permanente was formed in 1942 for Kaiser shipyard and steel workers. It opened to the general public in 1945. Now controlled in part by the 11,000 doctors who work for it, Kaiser believes its integrated system lets it break down barriers that can add cost or create confusion.

Like hospital administrators around the nation, Kaiser envisions a system that gives doctors access to up-to-the minute lab results and diagnostic images and lets healthcare workers treating a patient from different locations easily share information.

By 2007, when the system is due to be complete, Kaiser members also will be able to access their own medical records through the Internet. Besides electronic records, Chu said he also was focused on controlling healthcare costs.

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**"The healthcare industry as a whole, has to really take a hard look at keeping costs down," said Chu. "Frankly, I don't see how you can keep sustaining double-digit increases for much longer."**

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