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## **Panel 2: Impact of EHR Usability on the Consumer**

The Children's Partnership (TCP) is a California-based national, nonprofit child advocacy organization with offices in California and Washington, DC. TCP works to improve the health of the nation's children, and focuses on the opportunities provided by health information technology to advance enrollment in available health coverage, improve access to needed services, and improve coordination of care for children in foster care through electronic information exchange.

***Pediatric Usability:*** As the starting point, it is worth mentioning that well-designed health information technology has been demonstrated to improve patient health and provider performance and to engage patients in their own care.<sup>1</sup> However, to be optimally usable, the EHR must be designed to perform all of the tasks necessary for the provider to care for their particular patient group. This is a significant problem for the pediatric provider, who is not optimally supported by the EHR currently available in the market. To give just a few examples: a pediatric provider cannot record the exact time of birth (e.g., in hours, minutes, seconds); cannot use the EHR to calculate pediatric dosing (and instead has to use a pocket calculator); cannot rely on clinical decision-making tools, which are oriented toward adults (e.g., such as those re. drug-risk combination, which changes with age, height/weight). When usable and used, the EHR can result in a complete record, which is of great value to the provider, the wider care team, and to the consumer her/himself. System wide, prolific adoption and use of these tools is necessary to build the foundation for robust information flow.

***Improved Interactions:*** EHRs can and should be enhanced by features that improve interactions between providers and patients. Such features increase their usability and help build a partnership between the provider and the parent/patient, allowing them to work together to improve health. Specifically, some available features that enhance this relationship include:

-- A parent-viewable portion of the record that provides clear, visual information for discussion.

Examples: A child's growth chart plotted as against the reference norms;  
Immunization chart with red flags indicating missing immunizations.

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<sup>1</sup> M. B. Buntin, M. Burke, M. Hoaglin, and D. Blumenthal, "The Benefits of Health Information Technology: A Review of the Recent Literature Shows Predominantly Positive Results," *Health Affairs*, March 2011, Vol. 30, No. 3, 464-471.

- Decision-making tools with discussion points that promote dialogue.  
Example: A blood test indicating high lead-levels generates a set of questions to help parent/provider identify the cause of lead exposure and mitigation strategies.
- Tools that help a consumer manage their own care more effectively and communicate about it with their provider, when they're at home.  
Example: In-home monitoring systems that allow parents to maintain online symptom diaries and allow provider to remotely view data.

Parents of young children offer the perfect opportunity to build this partnership. They are eager to learn and do what's best for their child; they appreciate help coordinating care; and, they actively seek out information. Usability features like those mentioned above can make this partnership easier to accomplish, and in the end can lead a parent to become more engaged in their own care, as well.

***Improved Safety:*** A significant benefit of greater consumer involvement in the development and use of an EHR is that it can enhance a patient's safety, while also adding to their perception of safety. Consumers understand that better information results in better safety. Some examples of methods for involving consumers in the development of a complete, accurate EHR include:

- Pre-Visit Screening and Questionnaires:  
In advance of the office visit, under no time pressure, families can provide family history, identify concerns, and answer relevant questions.
- Information Reconciliation:  
Family has an opportunity to review information in the record, fill in gaps, flag errors, and submit corrections.
- Information in Consumer's Hands:  
Families can use available portions of their record to keep other providers informed, as well as themselves, even where they might not be linked by HIE.

Furthermore, improved access to the care team improves safety and helps families feel more secure. Health IT can improve access in many ways, including:

- Providing simple, usable tools that enable remote access to the provider, including online scheduling, secure messaging, patient portals, and remote monitoring.
- Sending electronic patient reminders that improve compliance with recommended visits, follow-up behavior, and follow-up care.
- Improving access to care through electronic enrollment in and management of available health insurance coverage.

***Getting to the Ideal:*** The ultimate value of health IT to consumers, hinges on real-time, rich data exchange. Consumers would like to see significantly more real-time health information exchange taking place:

- between providers (to ensure that full information is available to support their care; to create a complete, longitudinal record; to allow for optimal coordination – in the case of children, among designated clinical and non-clinical caregivers such as school-based health clinics, foster care case managers, and others);
- with public health agencies (for purposes of population-level research; to support registries – including immunization registries); and
- with consumer-facing tools (patient portals, PHRs, remote monitoring tools that capture health data at home and report back to the provider).

As discussed, health IT has demonstrated its potential to increase consumer engagement, improve health, and promote a real partnership between providers and their patients. However, this ideal, EHR-enhanced care experience has not yet been experienced by most Americans.