

Physicians spend more time on office work than seeing patients

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- Sinsky C, et al. *Ann Intern Med*. Sept. 6, 2016, <http://bit.ly/2dpohQu>.

Physicians are spending significantly more time on desk work like updating electronic health records (EHRs) than they are on seeing patients, according to a new study.

Data show physician burnout is on the rise, so researchers set out to see how doctors are spending their time.

Trained observers watched 57 physicians from family medicine, internal medicine, cardiology and orthopedics for a combined 430 hours on clinical office days. Twenty-one of those doctors also kept diaries to log after-hours work activities.

The team found physicians spent 27% of their day with patients and 49.2% of their time on EHR and desk work. The latter consisted largely of documentation and review but also included accessing test results and ordering medications.

Even while in the exam room, there was office work to be done. Researchers found 52.9% of this time was considered “direct clinical face time” while 37% was desk work.

The rest of the physicians’ day was spent meeting with staff, performing administrative tasks involving insurance or scheduling, traveling, or taking personal time.

After hours, physicians spent one to two hours completing work tasks, much of which involved EHRs.

“Our data quantify previous survey data showing that physicians report spending substantial work time using the EHR,” authors wrote. “These previous studies have suggested that decreased time with patients and increased workload from EHR tasks are major contributors to career dissatisfaction among physicians.”

