

## If Doctors Are Doing It...

by [Alice Leiter](#) [1]

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If the nine million weekly viewers of ABC's hit doctor show "Grey's Anatomy" believe that interns and residents have frequent, hot sex in the supply closets of their fictional Seattle Grace-Mercy West hospital, they'll believe anything. Which is why I was dismayed to see the negative portrayal of electronic health technology in recent episodes. The program arguably has a significant impact on how its viewers understand the life of a surgeon and what part technology can play in making our health care system as effective and trusted as it should be.

In the past two episodes, we see Seattle Grace-Mercy West in the throes of being sold to the brutally efficient-minded company, Pegasus Horizons. A prominent plot line woven into the palpable angst of the cast over the impending sale is the myriad ways in which The Man is going to ruin our heroes' and heroines' place of work (and play): omnipresent cameras monitoring goings-on, "brand ambassadors," a maximum of 15 minutes per patient encounter, and - worst of all, viewers are led to believe - an emphasis on "efficiency" that includes use of hand-held tablets in exam rooms and a "centralized electronic health record system." The horror!

The show is damning in its portrayal of the so-called "technical" difficulties experienced by the various technologies Pegasus is forcing on our good doctors. The use of technology is supposed to be viewed as a bad idea because it reinforces the narrow-minded, heartless, bottom-line approach to medicine of Pegasus; however, such an impression is hugely counterproductive to the various health system reform goals so many of us are working toward. A key part of [building support](#) [2] for health information technology and electronic health records specifically, each a crucial driver of reform, is achieving public trust.

Health IT has the potential to transform our broken health care system by increasing coordination among health care professionals, enabling vastly improved communications between doctors and patients, and allowing individuals direct access to their own, downloadable health information. Consumers should be insisting upon this at every encounter with the health care system. Yet, in order to create this demand, lawmakers, technologists, health care workers and policy-makers need to show consumers all that they stand to gain.

Portraying health IT - which can and does save lives, time and money - as a punch line is not only disappointing, but also irresponsible and even dangerous.

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