

## **Doctors offered electronic prescription system**

*Washington Post*

January 16, 2007

By Will Dunham, Washington (Reuters)

The National ePrescribing Patient Safety Initiative aims to coax physicians and pharmacies to use a Web-based prescription system designed to prevent medication errors often caused by illegible handwritten paper prescriptions.

At a news conference to unveil the plan, its advocates cited a 2006 Institute of Medicine report that found that more than 7,000 people die and at least 1.5 million are harmed by preventable medication errors in the United States annually.

They said the new system involves no cost to the doctor and requires minimal training.

The initiative involves several leading technology companies and health care providers, as well as politically well-connected figures including Newt Gingrich, former speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives.

"I'm very optimistic that e-prescribing is going to become commonly used," said Glen Tullman, CEO of Allscripts Healthcare Solutions Inc., a provider of medical software that along with computer maker Dell Inc. is leading the coalition of companies behind the plan.

Doctors are being invited to register for the program online at (<http://www.nationalerx.com>). "In the 21st century, the legibility of a doctor's handwriting should not determine whether a patient lives or dies," said Gingrich, who founded the advocacy group Center for Health Transformation.

"Yet the paper prescription system has remained essentially unchanged for 200 years. There is simply no excuse for medical errors when they are caused by an antiquated system that can easily be modernized and replaced," Gingrich added.

Dr. Nancy Dickey, former president of the American Medical Association, called electronic prescribing a way to improve patient safety.

"You would think if you were a pharmacist and you couldn't clearly read what I (as a doctor) had written, that you would simply pick up the phone and call. But it's astonishing how often they make their best guess," said Dickey, president of the Texas A&M University Health Science Center.

Only about a fifth of U.S. doctors currently prescribe drugs electronically, with the rest clinging to pen and paper.