

**New Coalition Gives U.S. Doctors Free E-Prescribing Software Services; The goal is to remove barriers -- most notably cost and complexity -- that doctors often cite as reasons for not using e-prescribing systems.**

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In the coming months, if your doctor doesn't use electronic prescriptions, it's time to ask, "Why?" After all, they'll be free. A coalition of tech and health care companies, led by clinical software provider Allscripts, is promising all U.S. doctors free access to e-prescribing Web applications, if they have a computer or PDA. E-prescriptions can eliminate errors from illegible writing and more easily flag drug interactions.

U.S. doctors write about 3.2 billion prescriptions a year, with less than 20% using e-prescribing. Doctors often cite complexity and cost as the obstacles.

The coalition, called the National ePrescribing Patient Safety Initiative, will begin offering hosted e-prescribing software services on Jan. 31. The services are based on Allscripts' eRX Now hosted software, used by about 20,000 U.S. doctors. Tech vendors, including Dell, Google, and Sprint Nextel, are providing technology and services in support of the effort, to the tune of \$100 million over the next five years.

With health care such a promising tech target, vendors are desperate to get this market spending on IT, and e-prescriptions are an easy starting place. Patients should welcome any effort to ensure that they aren't victims of medical mistakes.