Will iPads Lead to a Technology Arms Race?

CIOs see the potential in the ballyhooed devices

Physicians love their iPhones and the hundreds of medical applications that allow them to work smarter and faster. Although details about Apple’s next big thing—the iPad electronic tablet—are still sketchy, some tech-savvy medical experts think it may be even more helpful to physicians.

But will it cause another arms race and force hospitals to add “iPads for all” to their already lengthy IT shopping lists? The device will not come onto the market until this spring, and until chief information officers can get their hands on the touch-screen technology, it’s too soon to know.

But it’s not too soon for them to start dreaming.

In a blog post shortly after Apple CEO Steve Jobs introduced the iPad in late January, John D. Halamka, M.D., chief information officer of Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and Harvard Medical School, said his ideal clinical device would weigh less than a pound, have a long battery life, feature a built-in keyboard or a robust touch-screen input, and provide a platform for health care applications hosted on the device or on the Internet.

“The iPad comes closer to my requirements than other devices on the market,” wrote Halamka, who chairs the U.S. Healthcare Information Technology Standards Panel. “It will definitely be worth a pilot.”

In an interview, Halamka says he thinks hospitals will be slow to adopt iPads because they will likely lack enterprise management features. Nonetheless, he expects to see iPads in the hospital corridors shortly after they appear on store shelves. “Early adopters will bring them into the hospital, just as they have brought iPhones,” he says.

On the other hand, Kaiser Permanente is already experiment-

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