

ECRI's *Strategic Insights for Ambulatory Care* newsletter is being offered to CAPIC insureds at no cost. If you are interested in visiting any of the links in this edition, please contact Yvette Ervin, Vice President, CAPIC Risk Management, at YErvin@CAPphysicians.com.



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Strategic Insights for Ambulatory Care is a biweekly service provided by ECRI and the Cooperative of American Physicians (CAP). We welcome your comments; please send them to AmbulatoryCareRM@ecri.org.



We wish you a happy, healthy, and safe New Year!

Spotlight on Rural Healthcare



Professional organizations have **acknowledged that US rural areas are experiencing a healthcare crisis**. Rural organizations are **struggling to remain open** mainly due to compounding issues of inadequate payment structures, widespread staffing shortages, high rates of chronic diseases and risky health behavior that increase service utilization, an aging population, and poor social drivers of health that ultimately lead to extensive health disparities and worse outcomes compared to urban residents. The guidance article **Navigating Challenges in Rural Healthcare** discusses the significant and pervasive challenges in rural healthcare, including health disparities, patient access to care, staffing, and financial viability; and provides strategies to explore for improvement and sustainability.

What's New?

- Navigating Challenges in Rural Healthcare [read now](#)
- Blog: Rethinking Healthcare Safety: Differentiating from Other High-Risk Industries [read now](#)

Patient Safety & Relations

Participation in Medical Cannabis Program Associated with Reduced Prescription Opioid Use

What's the news. Among 200 adults with chronic pain, those who participated in the New York State medical cannabis program—which provided a monthly dispensation of medical cannabis from a dispensary pharmacist—reported significantly reduced prescription opioid receipt, according to a [study published December 8, 2025, in *JAMA Internal Medicine*](#).

Why it matters. Medical cannabis can potentially be used as an alternative to prescription opioid medications to manage chronic pain.

How ECRI can help. The article [Addressing Medical and Recreational Marijuana](#) discusses the use of medical and recreational marijuana, its impact on patient and workplace safety, and related laws.

Only 41% of US Rural Hospitals Still Offer Labor and Delivery Services

What's the news. Nearly 120 rural hospitals have stopped delivering babies since the end of 2020 or have announced that they will stop before the end of 2025, according to a [November 2025 report on rural maternity care](#) by a national policy center focused on improving healthcare payment and delivery systems. Only 41% of rural hospitals in the United States still offer labor and delivery services, many of which are at risk of closing due to mounting financial pressure.

Why it matters. Pregnant patients are "less likely to obtain adequate prenatal and postpartum care when it is not available locally," according to the report, putting them and their babies at higher risk of complications and death.

How ECRI can help. The guidance article [Obstetrics and Neonatal Safety](#) discusses initiatives to improve quality, prevent infant death and birth trauma, educate patients, and more.

Australian Nurses Support Offering Follow-up Within Two Weeks of Dementia Diagnosis

What's the news. Ninety-nine percent of Australian nurses surveyed support offering a follow-up consultation within two weeks of a dementia diagnosis, according

to a **study published in the December 2025 issue of *Aging and Health Research***. Ninety-seven percent of the nurses, of which 74% had provided care to more than 10 people with dementia in the previous month, also agreed with providing information about future dementia symptoms, lifestyle modifications, and advance care directives. However, far fewer (66%) agreed with providing information about probable life expectancy.

Why it matters. Patients receiving a dementia diagnosis may be both cognitively and emotionally overwhelmed and even with a support person present, it may be difficult to retain and understand all the information provided at diagnosis.

How ECRI can help. The guidance article **Diagnostic Excellence in Dementia Care** provides an overview of diagnostic errors among older adults, discusses barriers to timely and accurate dementia diagnosis, and offers systems-safety strategies to improve diagnostic excellence in dementia care.

Assessing Older Adults' Digital Skills to Identify Need for Digital Literacy Interventions

What's the news. A scale that measures digital skills among older adults may be useful in identifying patients who need interventions to effectively engage in digital health communication and management, according to a **study in the November 2025 issue** of the Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association. Approximately 30% to 50% of residents were unable to complete certain digital tasks independently, and an instructional handout or video was often insufficient to support successful task completion, particularly for patient portal-related tasks.

Why it matters. Part of health literacy is digital health literacy, which refers to a patient's "ability to seek, find, understand, and appraise health information from electronic sources," according to the 2023 primer article **Digital Health Literacy** from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality's Patient Safety Network. Examples include being able to find and evaluate online health information, access telehealth appointments, use a patient portal, and communicate with healthcare providers electronically.

How ECRI can help. The guidance article **Health Literacy** discusses steps organizations can take to promote a more health-literate patient population as well as relevant laws, initiatives, and standards related to improving health literacy.

Legal & Regulatory

A "Defensible Doctor" Practices Both Good Documentation and Good Medicine

What's the news. Clear communication, thorough documentation, adequate follow-up, and resolved communication loops are all key elements of being a "defensible doctor," according to an **article in the December 2025 issue of *Inside Medical Liability***. When a case goes to trial, courts focus on how the physician's clinical reasoning was documented in the record, if any departures from typical practice were

justified, and whether that physician acted "as a reasonably prudent provider would have under similar circumstances," the author states. Thus, strong cases are built on both the good practice of medicine and good documentation.

Why it matters. Documentation may seem simple, but the process has many pitfalls. Providers consistently face significant and widespread challenges with documentation, including excessive time demands, burnout, and reduced patient time.

How ECRI can help. The guidance article **Documentation: A Primer on Charting in the Medical Record** discusses how to overcome challenges related to documentation and the importance of maintaining records as legal documents.



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