Two recent data briefs from the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology tell a good news/bad news story about electronic health records. The good news, the ONC reports, is that nearly every hospital has an electronic health record system. The bad news? Hospitals still struggle with exchanging patient medical records with other healthcare providers.

The data, from a survey conducted by the American Hospital Association, describe trends in adoption of EHR technology among non-federal acute care hospitals between 2008 and 2015. The survey tracked the adoption of basic EHR systems and the possession of certified EHR technology — and shows that 96 percent of hospitals have an EHR that has been federally tested and certified for a government incentive program, created by the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health Act of 2009.

That figure represents a substantial improvement from 2011, the first year of incentives, when 71.9 percent of hospitals had EHRs. And it’s a huge jump from 2008, when only 9 percent of hospitals were using electronic record systems.

But only 18 percent of hospitals surveyed responded that their clinicians “often” use patient information received electronically from outside providers or other sources. About a third of respondents use such information “sometimes,” and more than a third say they use it “rarely” or “never.”
Why don’t more hospital clinicians use outside electronic information? The most common reasons given: The information is not available to view within the hospital’s own EHR, and it’s hard to integrate the exchanged information with the hospital EHR.