

Wal-Mart to enter medical records digitization market

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Early morning shoppers await the opening of a Wal-Mart store, in Panorama City, California, in 2007. US retail titan Wal-Mart is poised to enter the medical data market with the launch of a package that would help small doctor's practices to digitize their medical records, a spokeswoman said Wednesday.

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The consumer goods retailer, which is best known for its low-tech, cut-price household goods, will make the plunge in the coming weeks into the high-tech world of digitized [medical records](#), which was given a 19-billion-dollar boost in President Barack Obama's stimulus bill.

The system will be offered through Sam's Club, Wal-Mart's wholesale branch, which has "a long history of serving small business and over

200,000 medical professionals who are members," spokeswoman Susan Koehler told AFP.

"We feel a great need. We feel the timing is right given our country's goals for [health care reform](#). This will enable small town physicians to have greater access to health information technology," said Koehler.

eClinicalWorks will provide the software for the system and Wal-Mart is "in discussions with Dell" for the hardware, Koehler said.

The system would cost 25,000 dollars for the first doctor in a practice and 10,000 dollars for the second and third. The typical size of medical practices that are members of Sam's Club is one to three 2-3 doctors.

Wal-Mart is offering "bundles" which include the hardware, software, installation, training and maintenance.

"What has been a big barrier up to now is that doctors had to purchase all the individual elements, including training and maintenance," said Koehler.

"There was never one single purchase point. We will become that single point to funnel medical professionals through partners like eClinicalWorks and a hardware partner that will make this a streamlined experience," she said.

The medical [digitization](#) system would free up space, "get rid of all the paper" and ease communication with laboratories and hospitals, said Koehler.

"It's not intended to replace a person," such as a medical secretary, she said.

Wal-Mart expects to roll out the system in the next few months. Purchasing and installing a system would take another three months, to allow experts to evaluate the needs of the practice looking to install it.

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