

**The 2013
HealthLink Survey
of General Practices' Attitudes
Towards Information Technology Use**

The 2013 HealthLink Survey of General Practice Attitudes Towards Information Technology Use Within Their Practices

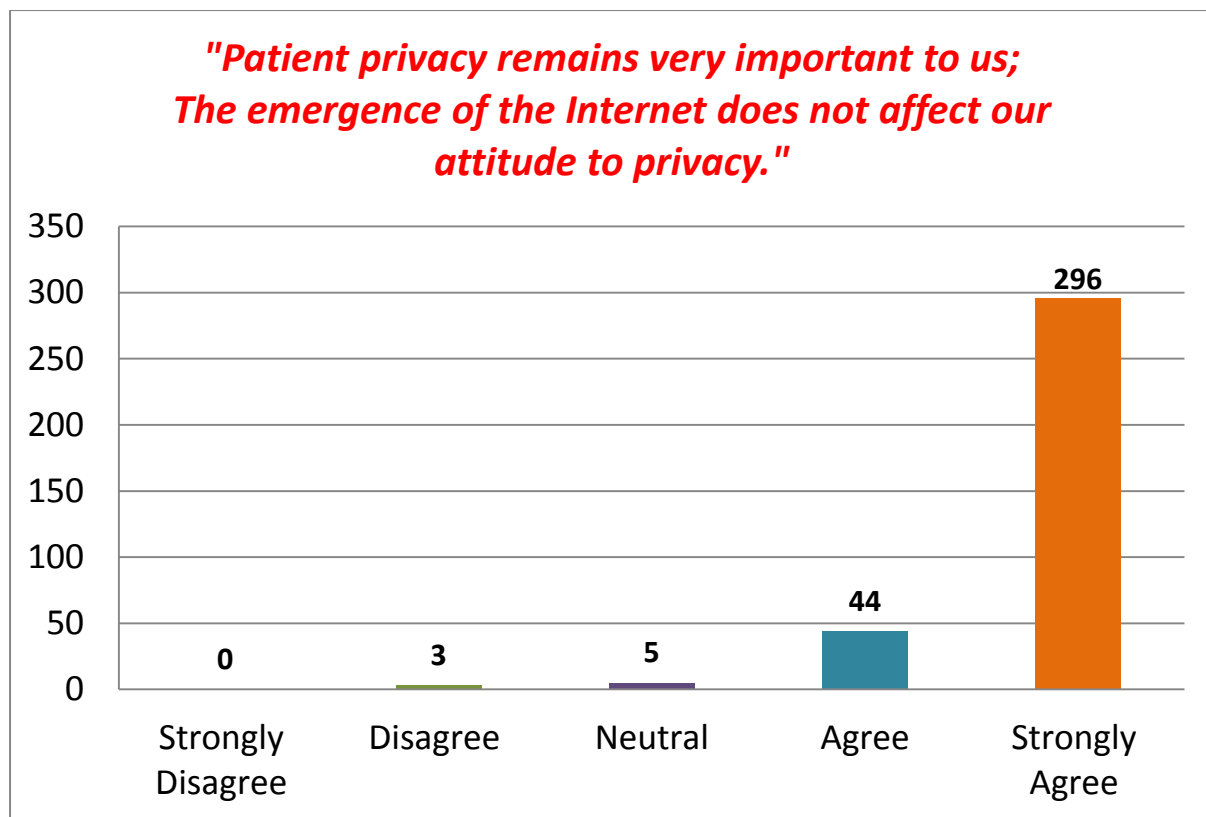
In February 2013 HealthLink undertook a survey of general practices' attitudes to use of information technology. We were interested in learning whether or not the emergence of the internet and related technologies had changed practices' attitudes to patient privacy, how much practices used their computers during clinical consultations and how keen they were to use their computers to find information about patients from remote sources.

We surveyed 1042 New Zealand general practices. We asked that the survey be completed by a general practitioner or practice manager on behalf of the practice. As an inducement we offered each person responding the chance to win one of three prizes, each a gift voucher or pack of New Zealand wine valued at \$100.

We received 364 responses (a 35% response rate).

The results were interesting. Our overall assessment is that New Zealand's general practices continue to take a very conservative stance on health information privacy but are open to sharing patient information (both getting information from other sources and allowing their information to be accessed), provided that they are assured that appropriate information security and privacy measures are in place. Because they have been high users of information technology for the past 15-20 years, New Zealand's general practices are well aware of the important risks and challenges that HIT poses to patient privacy and the enormous importance of maintaining the public's trust in the health system.

1. The Importance of patient confidentiality/privacy



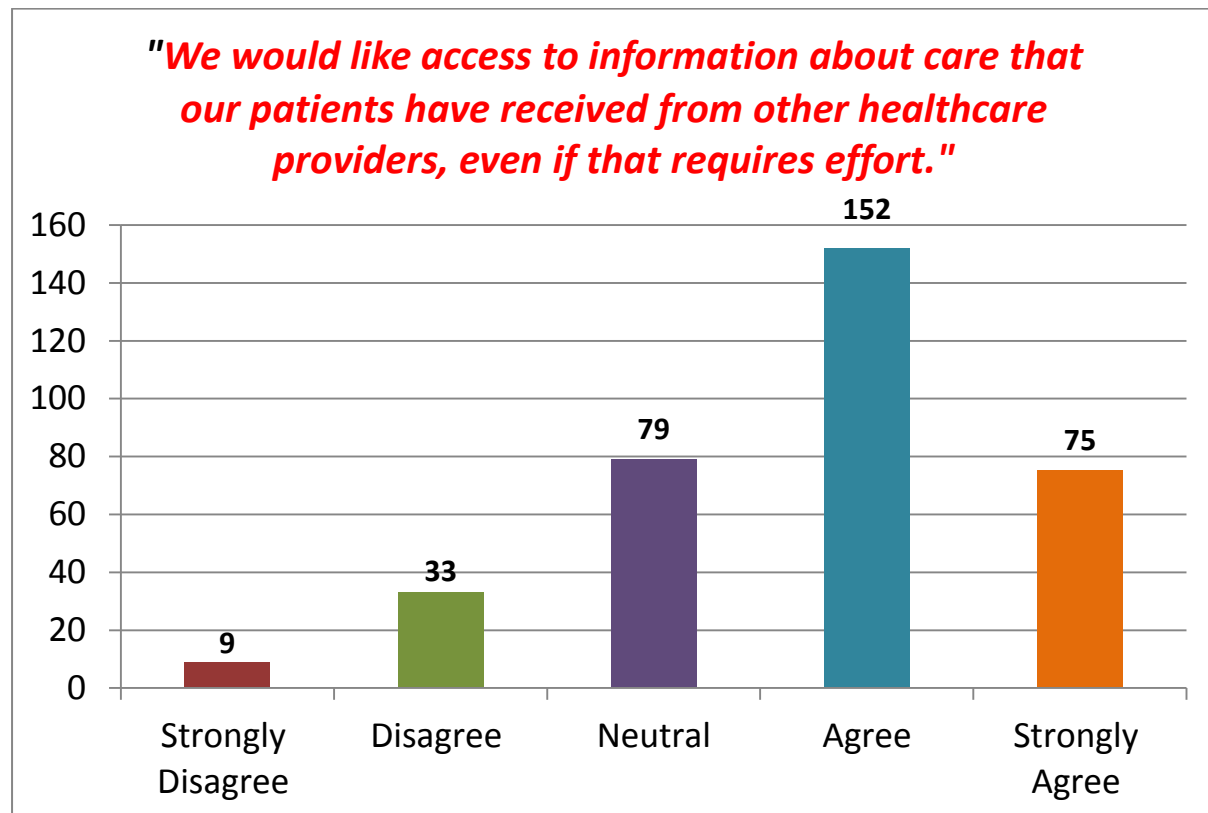
Quite clearly patient privacy is extremely important to general practices and the people that work in them. We were very pleased to see the resoluteness with which general practices embrace the importance of patient privacy, despite constant efforts to debate privacy's importance. We are often told that privacy no longer matters. A number of IT industry leaders seem to strongly believe that is the case.

"Consumer privacy issues are a red herring. You have zero privacy anyway. Get over it." - Scott McNealy - chief executive officer of Sun Microsystems - 2002

"The Age of Privacy is Over" – Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg- 2010

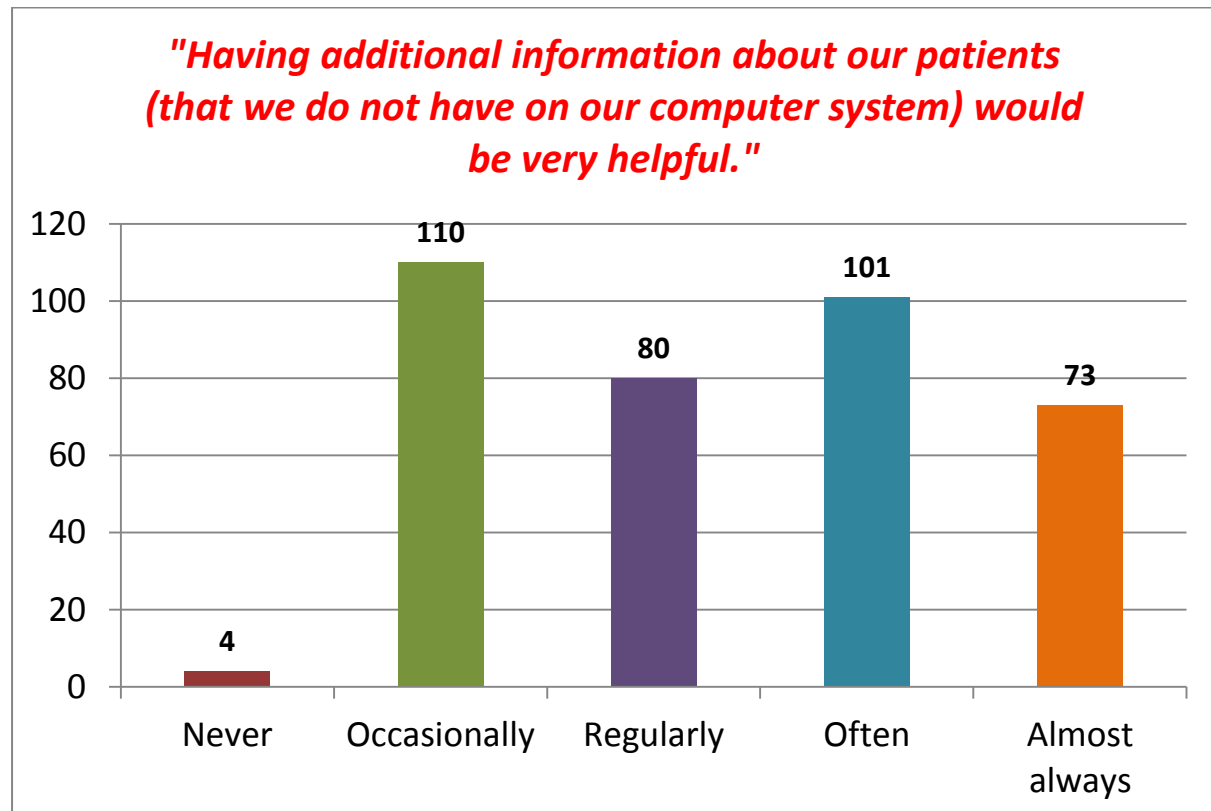
We are also told quite often that attitudes toward privacy are changing and that there is a "generational shift" and that one day information privacy won't matter to anyone. However, we don't believe that and nor it seems do our clients. We are pretty relieved to hear that.

2. The Value of using our computers to get more information about our patients



We believe that there is an increasing level of agreement that it would be useful to access information about patients from other sources, even if that requires effort; for instance, when one of our patients is in hospital, wouldn't it be good to look at what is happening on the hospital system? This is eminently achievable and in fact in some parts of New Zealand this has been happening for years.

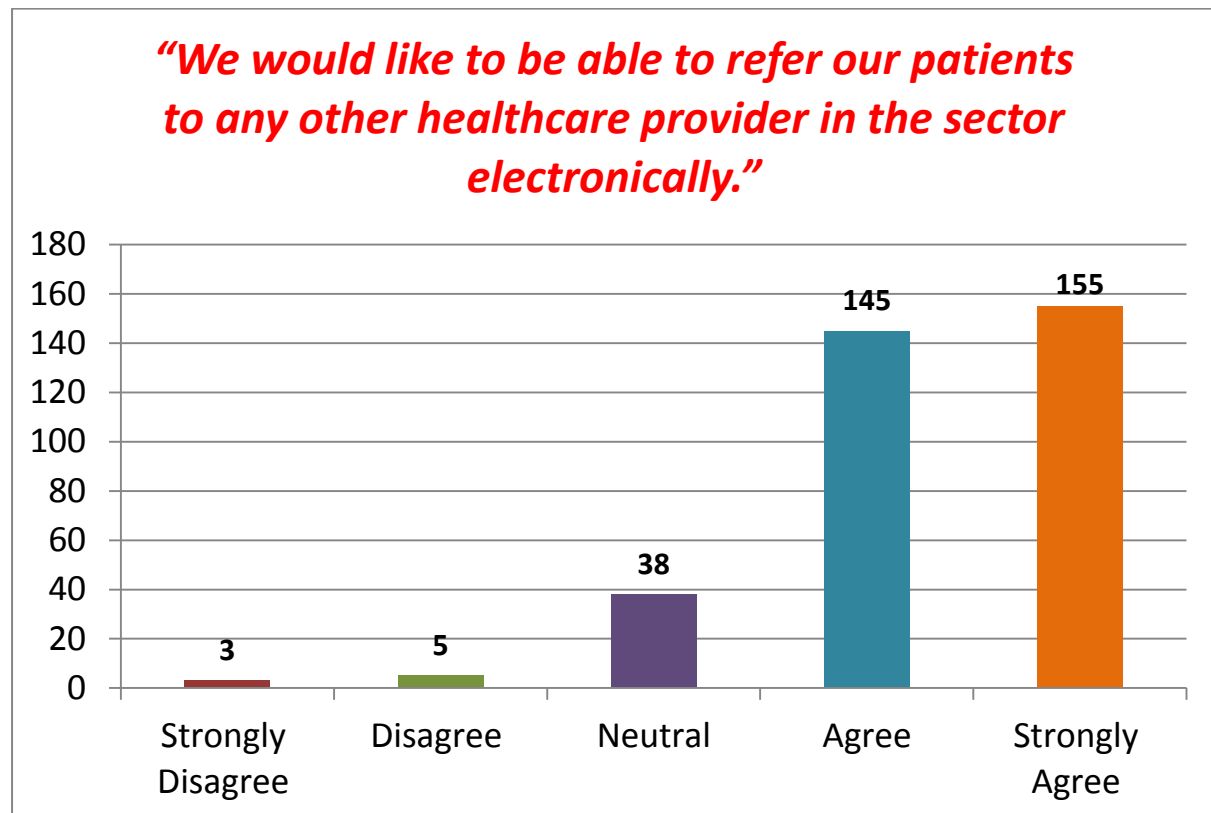
3. How frequently would we expect to use our computers to get more information about our patients?



What is important though, is to understand why this external information might be needed and how it would be used? We found this to be an interesting result. There is a very clear split between those practices and practitioners who feel it would be useful to have this ability but anticipate using it only infrequently and those who feel as though they would be likely to use it frequently.

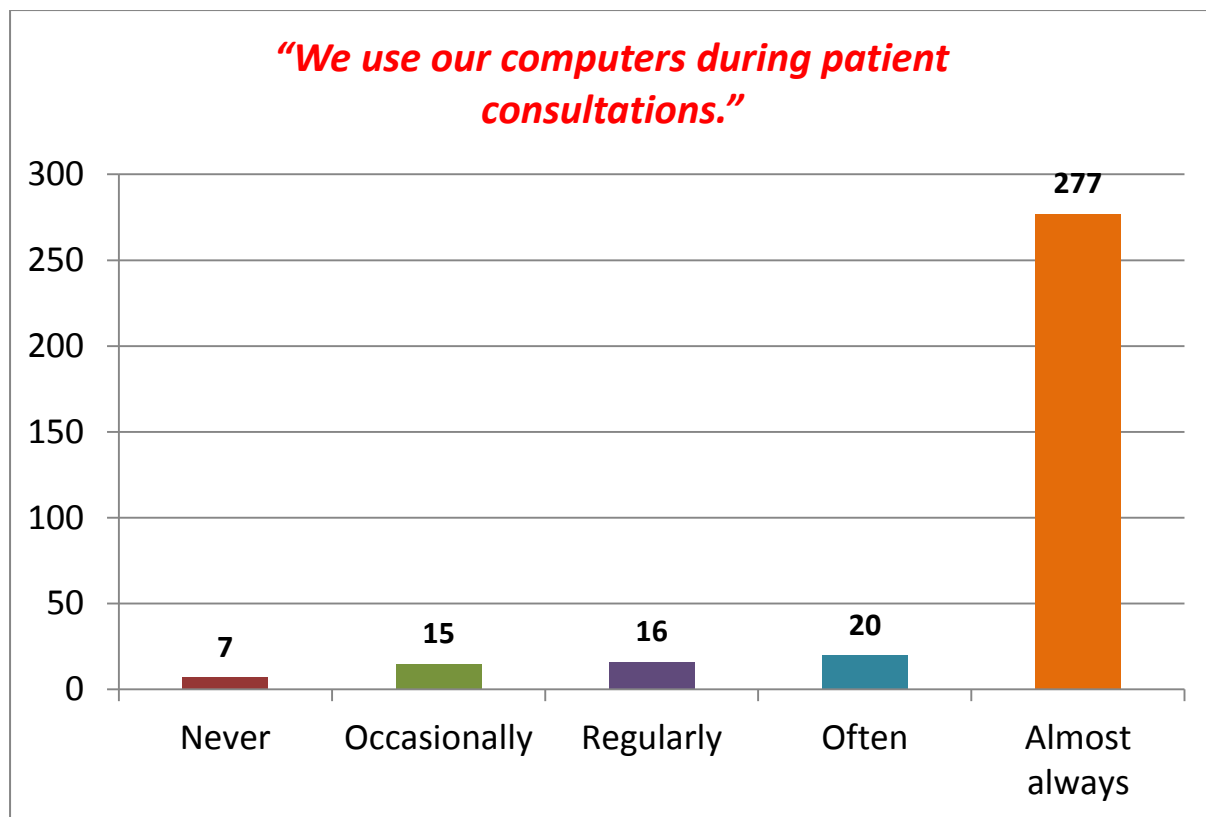
We plan to study this further so that we can develop an understanding of the use cases in which access to externally held records might be beneficial.

4. We would like to be able to use our electronic medical system to improve the efficiency of our referrals



Being able to electronically refer patients to any other healthcare provider in the sector is clearly seen as a desirable objective. This is good news from HealthLink’s point of view as we are about to launch a new service that combines decision support with electronic referrals to specialists and allied health providers, enabling general practices to evaluate and then choose referral options and make the referral very quickly and efficiently.

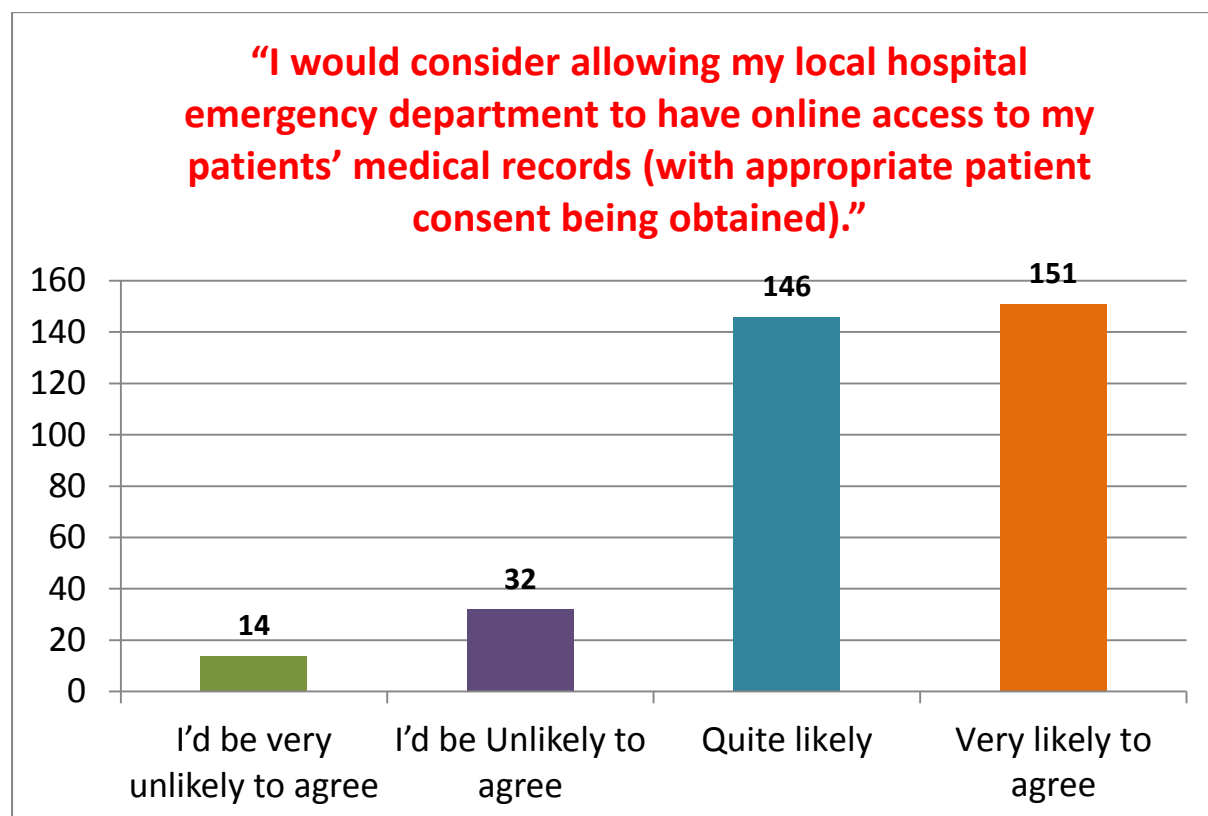
5. Use of Computers during patient consultations



Of course we all believed that our general practices nearly always use their computers during patient consultations. But here is the actual extent to which this is the case, with 78% of respondents stating that they almost always use their computers during patient consultations.”

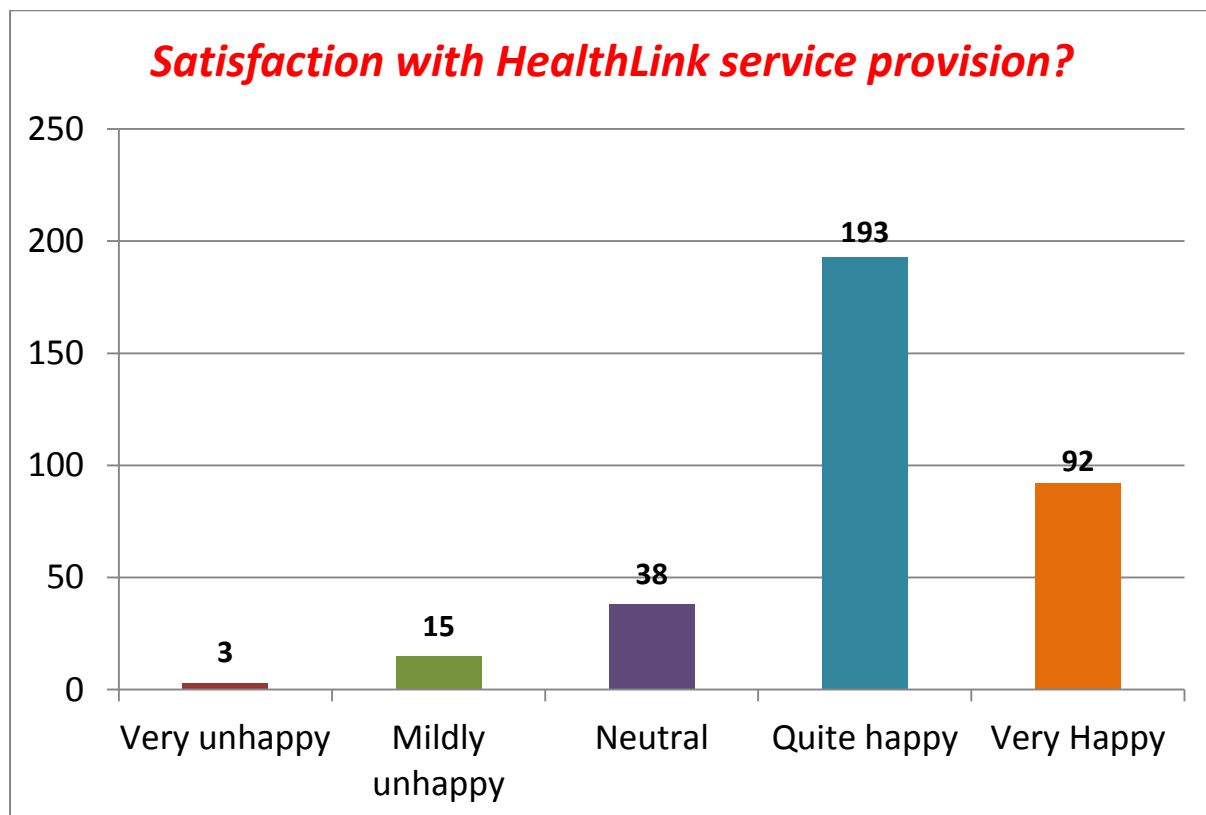
This is consistent with our expectations. Some New Zealand practices have after all had computers in their practices for more than 20 years. According to The Commonwealth Fund, New Zealand has the highest levels of advanced practice management system use in any of the eleven OECD countries they survey.

6. Information Sharing



HealthLink is very interested in understanding the extent to which practices are likely to allow their information to be shared, provided there is patient consent to do so. This is a relatively new frontier in terms of information sharing and we were pleasantly surprised to discover that 81% of practices were either quite likely or very likely to agree to share records in this manner.

7. Satisfaction with the HealthLink service?



Naturally we were pleased that 84% of respondents were either quite happy or very happy with our service. We do see room for improvement however and fully intend to increase the number of 'Very Happy' respondents by the time we do our next survey.