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Foreword

Information technologies are transforming the way health care is delivered. Innovations such as computer-based patient records, hospital information systems, computer-based decision support tools, community health information networks, telemedicine, and new ways of distributing health information to consumers are beginning to affect the cost, quality, and accessibility of health care. Changes in the health care delivery system, including the emergence of managed health care and integrated delivery systems, are breaking down the organizational barriers that have stood between care providers, insurers, medical researchers, and public health professionals. Old distinctions between clinical health information and administrative health information are gradually eroding as new health care delivery patterns emerge that are supported by, and in some cases reliant on, the widespread use of networked computers and telecommunications.

Bringing Health Care Online: The Role of Information Technologies discusses the synergy between information technologies and new trends in the health care delivery system as health care is brought online. It identifies some of the opportunities to improve health care delivery through increased use of information technology, and discusses some of the conceptual, organizational, and technical barriers that have made its adoption so uneven. The report identifies key technologies and shows how they are being used to communicate clinical information, simplify administration of health care delivery, assess the quality of health care, inform the decisionmaking of providers and administrators, and support delivery of health care at a distance.

OTA appreciates the assistance of the project advisory panelists, workshop participants, and contractors, as well as the many other individuals who participated in the study. OTA values their perspectives and comments; the report is, however, solely the responsibility of OTA.



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Note: OTA appreciates the valuable assistance and thoughtful comments provided by the advisory panelists. The panel does not, however, necessarily approve, disapprove, or endorse this report. OTA assumes full responsibility for the report and the accuracy of its contents.

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