



Powered by  Clickability

Technology helps patients take charge of health records

Updated 1/5/2007 6:44 PM ET

By Linda Stahl, The (Louisville) Courier-Journal

While you can retrieve cash from your bank account anywhere in the world and maintain your bank records online, Americans seldom maintain their health records by using software, hardware and Internet connections.

This is because the medical system has lagged in using information technology. Only an estimated 10% to 20% of U.S. hospitals and physician offices maintain fully computerized patient records.

But with many of us taking a greater interest in our health care — partly by researching health information online — some experts believe the time is ripe for patients to create their own electronic personal health record, also called a PHR.

Advocates say it's a new way to take your health in your own hands.

A PHR is a comprehensive record that you own, control and maintain over time. You decide when to share its contents — in response to a doctor's inquiry or because you think there is something more a doctor needs to know about your health history.

Your personal health record should be electronic, easily portable, private and secure.

The contents will include such essentials as your current medications and dosages, health-insurance info, living will, immunizations with dates, allergies, important recent medical test results, surgeries, family medical-history highlights and more.

Proponents say a personal health record can help health providers work more quickly, avoid errors and duplication of tests, and save lives.

"I'm a new mother with a 6-month-old," says Wendy Angst, general manager of CapMed, a Newtown, Pa., company that sells personal health record tools, including a CD-ROM and USB flash drive. "I created a USB for my daughter and started entering information when I was pregnant with her. It has information on all her immunizations and monthly doctor visits."

When you create your own personal health record, "you have the information and you become your own advocate for making sure the right information is available to the right people at the right time," Angst says.

If the idea of creating a personal health record seems daunting, "start with today," Angst suggests. "If you have an active chronic condition (like diabetes or asthma), just get your records for the last six to 12 months. You can constantly amend your data."

More than two dozen tools and services exist to build a personal health record. Some are free; others charge. AARP studied 24 such products and found the most expensive cost \$500, but many cost much less.

Dr. Edward Fotsch of San Francisco was an emergency-room physician for a decade before switching to a company that creates a Web-based personal health record tool.

"Seventy percent of our users are women storing information about kids, spouses, aging parents and themselves," says Fotsch, who runs Medem Inc., an online business that links the needs of patients and doctors through the Web at iHealthRecord.com.

Let's say you see an allergist, a gynecologist, an internist, a dermatologist, a dentist and a podiatrist in the course of a year. For your sake, your doctors should be aware of the others' treatments and tests.

Access to your personal health record can help in a medical emergency, even when traveling internationally.

The Institute of Medicine reported in July that 1.5 million adverse drug events occur annually, many because of interactions of drugs prescribed by different doctors. The institute concluded that patients "should learn to keep careful records of all the medications they are taking."

At the very least, services are duplicated and costs are driven up in the fragmented U.S. health care system.

Nationally, President Bush has called for the development of electronic patient records by 2014.

In the meantime, advocates say consumers should get ahead of the government efforts, partly because there is no reason to wait and partly because the very act of creating their own health history will make people more responsible for their health.

Personal health record tools and services also can also prompt patients to make follow-up appointments as well as issue warnings.

Fotsch says iHealthRecord.com sends an e-mail the same day that a drug has been recalled by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. That could immediately alert a family caregiver that an elderly parent's medication should be stopped.

Fotsch's Web-based service is free to patients, but physicians pay a \$35 monthly fee to participate. He says participation by your physician makes the program interactive and enhances communication.

Find this article at:

http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2007-01-06-phr_x.htm

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

Copyright 2007 USA TODAY, a division of Gannett Co. Inc.



Sponsored Links

More Winning Trades - eSignal Data Feeds

Stay on top of the market with real-time quotes, charts, news and more
www.esignal.com

Alternative to Open Back & Neck Surgery

Arthroscopic procedures, highly successful, get your life back!
www.laserspineinstitute.com

Lose 20 Pounds in 3 Weeks