

Electronic Health Records: What Your Patients Need to Know



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Electronic Health Records: Provider Guidelines for Engaging Consumers

With more and more physicians replacing medical charts with electronic health records (EHRs), some of your patients may have questions. They may want to know what kind of safeguards you have in place to help protect the privacy and security of their personal health information, and they may want to know how an EHR can help benefit their health.

You can help your patients make this transition by discussing any privacy concerns they may have and help them understand how their health information will be used or disclosed. For example, you can explain if you participate in a health information organization or some other type of organization to electronically exchange health information and under what conditions you may share their information.

Here are some additional discussion points that address the privacy and security of EHRs.

There are laws to help protect medical records.

State and federal laws help to protect medical records. Many of these laws include standards that are applicable to electronic health records.

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 helps to protect medical records.

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 created standards to help protect personal health information.



The HIPAA Security Rule helps keep medical records secure.

The HIPAA Security Rule requires health care providers to implement certain physical, administrative, and technical safeguards to protect the privacy of your medical records so that they can not be accidentally or illegally read, altered, shared or destroyed.



The HIPAA Privacy Rule created national standards to help protect the privacy of personal health information.

The HIPAA Privacy Rule went into effect in 2003. It created national standards to help protect the privacy of personal health information by doing the following:

- It gives patients more control over their health information.
- It sets boundaries on the use and release of health records.
- It establishes safeguards that health care providers must meet to help protect the privacy of health information.
- It balances the need for patient privacy with the need to help protect public health.
- It generally gives patients the right to look at and get a copy of their health record and to ask that errors be corrected.

State and federal laws offer increased protections for mental health and addiction treatment records.

State and federal laws offer increased protections for the confidentiality of records dealing with mental health and addiction treatment. The use of EHRs does nothing to alter this higher degree of confidentiality protection.

An EHR system can benefit physicians and patients in the following ways:



Reduces errors:

- Eliminates errors caused by illegible handwriting
- Checks to make sure the drugs patients are taking are not harmful when taken with other drugs

Improves security:

- Allows physicians to back up all medical records. If the office catches fire or floods, the medical records are safe.
- Allows physicians to keep track of, and to limit, who looks at a patient's medical record.

Saves time:

- Ends searching for a lost medical chart
- Ends thumbing through the pages of a patient's medical chart

Improves care:

- Tells the physician when it's time for a patient to get tests and shots, such as a yearly flu shot
- Tells the physician when he/she needs to follow up on lab tests,

especially if the tests show a patient has a problem



An electronic health record can be good for your patients' health.

An electronic health record can let physicians send and receive health information about patients over the Internet. Physicians can share information about patients with other physicians, as well as with hospitals, labs and the pharmacy. That can benefit patients in many ways:

- Patients don't have to fill out their medical history over and over.
- Once a patient informs the physician about medications and allergies, the patient doesn't have to worry about forgetting to inform a new doctor.
- Other than routine tests, patients won't have to get the same tests twice because the physician can see if another physician has already ordered it.
- Patients' medical history will be easily accessible in an emergency.
- A physician can send a patient's prescription to the pharmacy, so the patient doesn't have to take it or wait for it to be filled.

For more information, visit the eHealthWV Web site at www.ehealthwv.org.

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