

## **The Personal Health Record, an important tool for Monitoring Health, Anticipating Problems and Directing Treatment**

Someone has an accident and while being treated for injuries, learns that they have a serious disease and need immediate treatment or they will die. Stories like this are reported all the time. How many people find out too late and miss out on a lifesaving cure? Providers do a better, more complete and thorough job when they customize the care that they provide based on the uniqueness of their patients. This improves when patients are able to collect and share data that only they are likely to know and can provide a central perspective for successful health management.

### ***Personal Health Records prepared by patients contribute to more informed care and treatment.***

During routine health checkups, doctors may concentrate on some things that are not always as important to patients as others. Supplementing and consolidating records from different sources helps patients to focus efforts of their professionals and receive better results. Patients need reminders to tell their doctors about concerns and such things as free flu shots from the local community center and vitamins and over-the-counter medicines that are taken regularly. They also need to follow up on promises by specialists to send reports to primary care physicians.

***A growing industry is forming around healthcare provisioning and self-help.*** Already, innovative new products, services and technologies are adding value. More and more they will provide better ways to address personal needs while avoiding unproductive, wasteful efforts. For those who have visited a doctor recently, it is probably obvious how important it is to get more involved. Care givers need to focus where they are needed most, which is on providing solutions, and to get help from others in finding and identifying problems, completing paperwork and following up on details. The more patients can do to help, the better. It will provide greater value from healthcare time and expense. After all, there is a lot more to good health than getting prescriptions filled and taking a few pills. The Personal Health Record is a self-help tool that helps with patient-doctor communications.

### ***Personal Health Records (PHRs) differ depending upon how they are formatted and delivered.***

With all of the organizations pursuing healthcare opportunities, the challenge becomes, what is best for the patient? There are different advantages and disadvantages to each alternative. Here are a few things to consider when selecting a Personal Health Record product.

- ***Nothing is perfectly able to identify everything that is malfunctioning in a person's body.*** Physical exams help, but there is no perfect doctor, no perfect test, nothing will scan the body and give an exact printout of things that need to be fixed. Something like this is a holy grail, but there is a long way to go to get there. Sometimes an insignificant piece of data is critical. Think about how much more complicated the human body is than an automobile. Despite all the sophisticated, computerized automotive test sets, mechanics still can end up replacing a number of parts before they find the solution. Then again, more than one factor can contribute to a single problem.
- ***Every doctor is different.*** Otherwise, why would anyone think about getting a second or third opinion? Some are more experienced than others; some are better at one thing or than another. They create and maintain records differently. Some records are more detailed and complete, and others, more clear and concise. However, regardless who created and maintains them, doctors make better decisions when they have better, more complete information. This is where the patient and their PHR come in.
- ***Personal Health Record (PHR) tools also differ.*** There are tradeoffs. Some products are “free” (supported by advertising); others have an initial cost or subscription fee. They involve databases that are provided as an on-line service or downloaded for use on a person's computer. They are organized and structured differently and emphasize different content. Direct personal control avoids privacy concerns and the need to re-enter data should a person change insurance companies or other supporting vendor. Internet based services avoid the hassle of maintaining software applications on a PC. Tools share common elements, but have their own unique attributes.

***The importance of monitoring vital signs is gaining attention.*** Tests are useful, but spotting trends can also uncover disorders and track progress in making treatments. Better devices are coming to market that enable patients to measure their own vital signs. Blood pressure, pulse and glucose levels are important examples. Many products store data and print out test results. Some monitors enable information to be transferred to computer databases or PHRs where the data can be used to develop trends and sent to doctors electronically.

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