

***Why everyone should have a Personal Health Record***  
**Here are some sound bites to consider.**

***Responsible individuals are getting more and more involved in the management of their healthcare.*** With today's healthcare uncertainties, this is becoming important for everyone. No one else has the same perspective and vested interest that the patient has. If we abuse our bodies, we suffer the consequences. By playing an active role in the management of our healthcare, we are more likely to enjoy the rewards of longer, healthier, more productive lives. Personal Health Records (PHRs) are tools that help us to do this job better.

***Health records are scattered in bits and pieces*** from doctor's offices to pharmacies, testing labs, hospitals, nursing homes and insurance companies. Good decisions require good information. Consolidating records helps, but still does not provide the complete story. Individuals know important details about themselves that should also be included. A Personal Health Record serves as a reminder to help patients share and discuss important matters with their doctors. A PHR also helps when checking the accuracy of bills and other records prepared by others.

***Medical records vary in content, quality, format and completeness.*** Variation stems from differences in the purposes for collecting information and the background, interest and experience of those creating it. Without universal standards, preparation is subject to personal interpretation. During routine health checkups, if there are no reasons to the contrary, doctors typically apply a one-size-fits-all approach. The result is spending time examining things that are not always the most important and overlooking others. Those patients who come to their appointments equipped with questions, concerns and supplemental information can have a big advantage. A PHR serves as a good reminder that helps to increase the value received from office visits.

***DNA testing combined with family medical histories helps to target evaluation and treatment.*** Diseases can run in families, races, ethnic groups and geographic areas. Knowing about family members enables healthcare professionals to provide better, more targeted care to those who could have inherited the same problems. Similarly, including information about lifestyle can aid in looking for diseases associated with environmental exposures and physical activities. It is important to include these types of information in Personal Health Records.

***Different solutions meet different needs.*** Some records are associated with billing and insurance claims; others are associated with test results and reports of an operational nature. Different products are also available to create records from a patient perspective. These create and maintain Personal Health Records. Some are downloadable or boxed software products; others are on-line, Internet-based applications.

***Patients need Personal Health Record products that are right for them.*** Different needs dictate different recordkeeping requirements. Patients especially need PHRs that will help them to receive better, more proactive care. PHR formats should be flexible enough to format information from the patient's perspective. This requires an ability to collect and share data that accurately and thoroughly describes the condition of the person's health. A primary objective is to uncover problems before they become insurmountable. Providers should be able to do a better, more complete and thorough job if they can customize the care that they provide based on unique data about their patients. A patient perspective can be especially helpful.

***Consider advantages and disadvantages of features and functions.*** The challenge becomes one of selecting the product that best meets the needs and preferences of the individual. We prefer products that are simple and straightforward (intuitive) to use. Yet we look for capabilities that are important to us. We believe that it is better to pay a reasonable amount than to use something that is "free," but is cluttered with distracting ads. We also like to deal with companies that make suggestions to help users get better value from their products and are receptive to making improvements based on user feedback. Self-help enhancement are added enticements.

***A new industry is forming around better healthcare provisioning and self-help.*** It is in its infancy, but 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 time 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 an excellent self-help tool.

***The importance of monitoring vital signs is gaining more attention from patients.*** Tests are always useful, but spotting trends can be essential in discovering disorders and tracking 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 where the data can be graphed or sent directly to doctors.

***Things to consider when selecting a product and building a Personal Health Record.***

- ***Will you want a Google, Microsoft, hospital, medical group or doctor to keep your record for you?*** We believe that it is better to take the “do-it-yourself” approach. Others won’t necessarily focus on things that are important to you, the patient. Also, can you really expect them or their employees not to lose private data or share it? During hurricane Katrina, many providers lost all their patients’ records. Leaving an only copy at home is no better. Back it up online and carry a copy in a flash drive on a key chain.
- ***What if you change providers and they have your records?*** What if a doctor retires and you need to get started all over again with someone new. Will you get copies of all your records to give to the new doctor? What if you get incomplete notes that leave more questions than they answer?
- ***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 another. Regardless of other factors, they all will make better decisions if they have better, more complete information. Patients can help to decide whether additional opinions and specialists are needed.

***Outcome Improvement prepares people and organizations for a changing world.*** Everyone can have an impact on their healthcare outcomes. Whether we like it or not, we can make the difference between success and failure in our own care, treatment and longevity. Even without a medical degree, we fill knowledge and experience gaps and help make assessments, generate ideas, plan strategies, select alternatives and assure follow-through that provides optimum results.

Healthcare is one of the areas important to Outcome Improvement. Learn about the things that will make a difference in your life. Prepare to participate in your healthcare decisions. Start now, if you haven’t already, to create a Personal Health Record. We will help you.

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