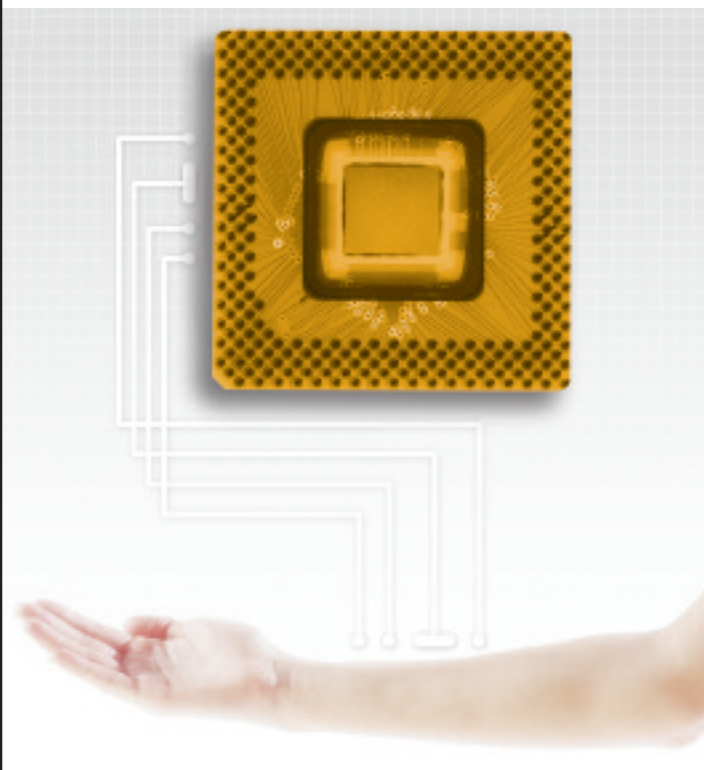


# YOU CAN TAKE IT WITH YOU

DATABASES, WEB TOOLS, SMART CARDS BRING NEW VALUE TO PERSONAL HEALTH RECORDS

**H**ow much personal health care information do you keep in your head? A list of medication allergies? Sure. Details of past surgeries? Maybe. Dates and results of previous laboratory tests? **DOUBTFUL.**



But being able to provide all of that information at the point of care assists health professionals and hospitals in providing the highest quality, safest and most efficient treatment. That's why the ability to electronically store, manage and access essential health information has become so valuable.

Just look to Hurricane Katrina for evidence, said Doug Henley, M.D., executive vice president of the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), which has become a leader in advancing electronic connectivity. "Of course, we would have preferred the hurricane hadn't happened, but just imagine if all those people had their clinical health summaries on memory sticks in their pockets," or available online, he said. "Then, whether they ended up in Houston or Baton Rouge or wherever, they would have had that information available so that any physician or hospital could review their past medical history, their current medications, their allergies and so forth. That would be truly valuable."

In recent years, various tools have been developed to manage personal health information through the Web. And UnitedHealth Group is testing new technology that will allow consumers to access their personal health records via a "smart chip" in the health care cards that consumers carry in their wallets. Through a pilot program in 2006, individuals will be able to bring their card to a doctor's office or hospital, where it will be run through a card reader with the patient's permission, enabling the physician to view the consumer's medical history. >>

“A crucial element... is the need to view electronic health records as the central nervous system of the redesigned [physician] practice.”

— Doug Henley, M.D., Executive Vice President of the American Academy of Family Physicians

“The smart card can help physicians more easily maintain current records on patients, avoid drug prescription errors, reduce fraud and provide better treatment, especially in cases of referrals to a new doctor or emergency cases when the hospital is unfamiliar with the patient,” said Phil Philliou, chief product and strategy officer for Exante Financial Services, a unit of UnitedHealth Group that is involved in the “smart card” project. “In addition, specialists can find much of what they need via this smart card, which minimizes the time and inconvenience of contacting the patient’s primary physician to track down important medical information.”

One of the key advancements of the smart card is that the personal health information it contains will be pre-populated with the consumer’s medical and pharmaceutical experiences, thereby enhancing the tool’s accuracy and usability.

“Our experience with pre-populating information for the Personal Health Manager on myuhc.com impressed upon us the value of making medical, pharmaceutical and laboratory testing information easily available for consumers,” said Reed V. Tuckson, M.D., senior vice president of Consumer Health and Medical Care and Advancement at UnitedHealth Group. “In addition, our experience with the Personal Health Manager has enabled us to insure that this information is kept secure while at the same time allowing individuals to make the records available to their health professionals, hospitals and designated family members.”

Later this year, many consumers will have access to a new feature of the Personal Health Manager: a “one-click” health summary that can be printed and kept on file or shared with a physician. The summary will display the past two years of health information related to conditions, medications, procedures and lab results. Also, that summary will soon be able to be accessed via swipe card technology using consumers’ member ID cards in their physicians’ offices.

Dr. Tuckson said the advent of personal health records signifies the convergence of consumerism and technology. “As we enter into a new era of patient-centered care where the patient’s needs are the focus for the delivery of health and medical services, it is essential that new electronic capabilities be established to utilize the power of inter-connected databases and information systems to create personal health records for each individual,” he said.

An essential requirement to advancing the development and dissemination of personal health records is physician leadership, Dr. Tuckson added, noting the significance of efforts such as the AAFP’s Center For Health Information Technology.

Dr. Henley said the center was created because the AAFP “recognized the need for family physician practices to look at how they could redesign themselves to become more efficient, improve quality, improve patient safety, and make the patient – the customer – more of a central focus of the practice. A crucial element of that effort is the need to view electronic health records as the central nervous system of the redesigned practice.”

Today, 20 to 25 percent of family practices now have electronic records, up from 7 percent two years ago, and another 30 percent are strongly considering implementation within 12 to 18 months. Those electronic capabilities make it easier for physicians to assist with the effort behind digitized personal health records for individuals, Dr. Henley explained.

A July survey from the consulting firm Accenture reveals that consumers recognize the value such technology brings to health care. An overwhelming majority of respondents believe electronic medical records will improve quality of care (93 percent); reduce treatment errors in hospitals (92 percent); lower health care costs (75 percent); and decrease wait times in doctors’ offices and emergency rooms (78 percent).

According to Dr. Henley, Dr. Tuckson and other experts, personal health records and other forms of electronic interconnectivity will help to:

- Ensure individuals get safer care;
- Reduce the redundancy of diagnostic tests, medications and other health interventions, thereby decreasing health care costs and improving quality;
- Improve patient satisfaction and compliance with prescribed therapies;
- Enhance the coordination of health and medical care services; and
- Increase patient participation in the process of health care delivery with their health professionals.

“With a personal health record,” Dr. Henley said, “important medical information can go wherever the patient needs it, wherever the patient goes.” ■