

Putting the **I** in Health**IT**

Health IT: Advancing America's Health Care

Our health care system is helping to cure diseases, extend our lives, and improve the well-being of our communities. Now, through the use of secure health information technology, health care will benefit from advancements that are making sure health information is confidential, available when and where it is needed, contributing to safer, higher quality, more coordinated, and more efficient and less costly care for everyone.

What Is Health IT?

The term “health information technology” (health IT) refers to the electronic systems health care professionals – and increasingly, patients – use to store, share, and analyze health information. Health IT includes:

- **Electronic health records (EHRs).** EHRs allow doctors to better keep track of your health information and may enable them to see it when you have a problem even if their office is closed. EHRs also make it easier for your doctor to share information with specialists, so that specialists who need your information have it available when it's needed.
- **Personal health records (PHRs).** A PHR is a lot like an EHR, except that you control what kind of information goes into it. You can use a PHR to keep track of information from your doctor visits, but the PHR can also reflect your life outside the doctor's office and your health priorities, such as tracking what you eat, how much you exercise, and your blood pressure. Sometimes, your PHR can link with your doctor's EHR.
- **Electronic prescribing (E-prescribing).** A paper prescription can get lost or misread. E-prescribing allows your doctor to communicate directly with your pharmacy. This means you can go to the pharmacy to pick up medicine without having to bring the paper prescription.
- **Privacy and security.** All of these electronic systems can increase the protections of your health information. For example, electronic information can be encrypted so that only authorized people can read it. Health IT can also make it easier to record and track who has accessed your information.

Health IT Tools You Can Use

Take Control of Your Health with Health IT

- Next time you get a prescription, ask your health care provider if he/she uses e-prescribing – it makes your life easier.
- At your next health care visit, ask your provider to have a summary of the office visit sent to you electronically and securely, to help you keep track of your information.
- Looking for a new health care provider? Ask if he/she has an EHR – you're likely to get more coordinated care.
- If your doctor uses an EHR, ask if you can access your records online – you can check to make sure your information is correct and add anything that's missing.
- Set up your own personal health record – knowing your own health means you can manage it better.
- Use personal health tools like texts, smart-phone apps, and other high tech tools to set and meet your own health goals.
- Join an online community. Through online communities, you can share information with – and emotionally support – others facing similar concerns about a particular disease or disability.

Putting the I in Health ITsm

The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services' Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT (ONC) has kicked off a nationwide, multi-pronged educational campaign to explain how Individuals are Putting the I in Health ITsm. The campaign is designed to break down the complex subject of health IT, enabling readers and viewers to connect on a personal level with stories about the nation's transition to an electronic health care environment. To learn more about health IT and how you can use technology to manage your health care and interact with your provider, go to www.HealthIT.gov.

Health IT can free you to focus on your health instead of on the everyday hassles of managing your health care.

Some examples include:

- **Faster, more accurate prescriptions:** E-prescribing systems automatically send prescription orders to the pharmacy for you so your medicine is ready for pickup when you arrive, saving you time. E-prescribing can also reduce the potential for medication errors, such as those made by messy handwriting on a paper prescription.
- **Rapid information sharing:** When a provider adds patient notes or test results to your EHR, that information may be available to the health care providers authorized to view your records, so that they can have access to the most up-to-date information about your health. Some health care providers may allow you to access your own health information directly, meaning you no longer have to wait to hear back from your doctor for information, such as test results.
- **Reduced paperwork:** As a patient, you have probably answered the same questions about personal information and medical history dozens of times on seemingly identical forms. When health care providers share your electronic health information, you may not need to write down the same facts repeatedly.
- **Reduced unnecessary tests:** Doctors sometimes order tests that you've had before simply because they do not have easy access to prior test results. If all your test results are recorded in EHRs that can talk to each other, a health care provider can see your prior test results that are available and order only truly necessary tests and procedures, saving time, money, and discomfort while reducing risk.
- **Better follow-up, better follow-through:** Many EHRs incorporate reminder systems for both you and your doctor. For example, some EHRs remind your doctor to follow up with you about ongoing health conditions or to offer you information or services in response to changes in your health. At the same time, some EHRs can send you email or text message reminders about making or keeping appointments, staying current with treatment and medications, and other ways to improve your health.
- **Secure access to information:** In the event of a natural disaster or other tragedy, having your records in an EHR should make it easier to reassemble your records, and to make them available to providers away from home, in the event that you need to relocate temporarily or permanently. The Federal Government requires certified systems to meet certain security standards so that professionals and others you designate can see only the information they need to manage your care effectively; your State laws may require additional protections.

Protecting Your Privacy. Protecting Your Health.

The privacy and security of protected health information is a top priority for patients and their families, health care providers, and the Federal Government. Federal laws require many of the key persons and organizations that handle health information to have policies and security safeguards in place to protect your health information, whether it is stored on paper or electronically.

You have **strong, clearly defined rights** when it comes to protecting your health information, and these rights extend to electronic health information. If you believe your health information privacy has been violated, the **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)** has a division, the **Office for Civil Rights**, that can help. Visit them online at www.hhs.gov/ocr.