

# Consumer-based Records Create HIM Opportunity

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by Beth Friedman, RHIT

The power of the Internet combined with our evolution toward e-HIM is driving HIM toward the next plateau—providers connecting with consumers on the Internet through consumer-based health information. This article will discuss the consumer-based health record and its place in the future of HIM.

## The Future Is Now

Today, providers are developing Web portals and Web-based record systems through which patients can communicate with physicians, access information, record findings, and maintain their own health information. Just as the airlines are pushing consumers to the Web with online reservations, seat selection, and frequent flyer account management, providers are encouraging patients to manage their own health information online.

Not to be confused with health content companies (health information on the Web), consumer-based health record Web sites are just beginning to attract attention in the marketplace. The 55 years and older segment is reported to have one of the highest rates of online adoption with 70 percent of Web-savvy seniors using the Internet to research health information. <sup>1</sup> Given this statistic and the aging Baby Boomer market for healthcare products, the outlook for online consumer health records is extremely positive.

Research published by Harris Interactive found that nearly 90 percent of adults who use the Internet would like to interact with physicians online. More than a third would pay for that privilege. In the American Hospital Association's 2003 Most Wired Hospital survey, 71 percent of providers offer medical advice online and another 53 percent allow patients to pre-register online. <sup>2</sup>

## Web Pioneers

A pioneer in personal health records online is MyLife ([www.doctorglobal.com](http://www.doctorglobal.com)). At this Australian Web site, visitors can enter personal medical information including history, allergies, insurance information, next of kin, and other health data. The member decides exactly who can view the information and who can update it. Once entered by the member and given proper authorization, the member's caregiver can view all information entered and even update the record.

Closer to home, the Michigan Electronic Medical Record Initiative (MEMRI) is advocating a statewide project that would save approximately \$350 million per year. <sup>3</sup> With the system, Michigan residents would have their own private, secure, and complete electronic health record (EHR). Data and images would continue to reside in individual provider computer systems throughout the state and be accessed only with patient approval. This project is scheduled for pilot implementation this summer.

At Geisinger Health System in Danville, PA, patients can view personal health information and communicate with doctors via a secure Web site. Patients can review histories and allergies and send corrections to their providers, according to Geisinger's chief medical information officer James M. Walker, MD. They can also request appointments, renew prescriptions, and report blood pressure and blood glucose measures.

Sutter Health in Sacramento, CA, now offers one of the most successful and innovative patient service Web sites. Patients of Sutter-affiliated Palo Alto Medical Foundation who visit the site can access parts of their medical records, view test results, request appointments and prescription refills, ask questions about bills, and link to health information. According to the organization, there are about 9,000 patient participants and 250 physician members. <sup>4</sup>

## A New Era of Record Management

The Internet has delivered conveniences in many areas of our lives and tomorrow's patients will expect the same technology when receiving healthcare services. This transformation is driving HIM professionals into a new era of record management.

HIM professionals will be needed to educate patients who want to manage their own health information. From answering questions about medical records to helping consumers ensure the highest level of privacy for their online information, our skills and training will be in high demand. Consider the opportunities this will generate for our profession:

- Recognition as knowledge leaders in creating, managing, and storing health records
- Opportunities to establish guidelines and help educate consumers
- Further positioning of HIM professionals as health information privacy and security experts
- Involvement of HIM professionals in the development of consumer record Web sites

According to AHIMA's E-health Task Force, HIM professionals are responsible for managing two basic objectives related to health information: data collection and facilitating information use.<sup>5</sup> The same principles that we use to manage paper records pertain to electronic health information. As HIM professionals, our responsibility is to lend experience and knowledge to the development and management of systems and standards to support online records.

*Learn more about personal health records in "Online Records Serve Patients, Clinician, and HIM," (Journal of AHIMA, September 2003, pp. 34-37.)*

## Notes

1. SeniorNet. "SeniorNet Survey on Internet Use, November 2002." Available at [www.seniornet.org/php/default.php?PageID=6880](http://www.seniornet.org/php/default.php?PageID=6880).
2. Rollins, Gina. "Connecting with Consumers." Healthcare's Most Wired Magazine 2003 (Summer). Available at [www.hhnmostwired.com](http://www.hhnmostwired.com).
3. The Michigan Electronic Medical Record Initiative Web site (2002). Available at [www.memri.us](http://www.memri.us).
4. "Connecting with Consumers."
5. AHIMA's E-health Task Force. "Your Job in the E-health Era." *Journal of AHIMA* 73, no. 6 (2002): 32-35.

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