

EHR, PHR Benefits: Proof is Use

Save to myBoK

by Jill Callahan Dennis, JD, RHIA

No one relishes the experience of being a patient or of having a family member be a patient. But being put in that position reminds us of the importance of accurate and complete health information, both for the healthcare system and for the individual patient.

The Power of PHRs

As I write this, I'm sitting in my husband's hospital room, waiting for a bronchoscopy to reveal whether a just-detected lung mass is cancerous or benign. (Yes, he's permitted me to share this information with you.)

My husband, Ron, has a complicated health history, and he takes a number of prescriptions. Keeping them all straight has been a challenge for both of us, but he has them listed in a personal health record (PHR) and keeps that information up to date as changes are made in dosages or schedules.

Ron was wise enough to print out a copy of his medication list and bring it with him to the hospital. The staff found it easy to incorporate the information into the hospital's electronic health record (EHR), making it possible for him to have no lapses in his medication schedule. Although I normally consider myself fairly good under stress, I can tell you that if we had been required to recite those medications from memory, it's highly likely that the information would have been inaccurate or incomplete in some way. We believe in the power of PHRs. Do you?

EHR: Work in Progress

I was encouraged to see that the hospital has an EHR. Upon Ron's arrival, the nurse wheeled in a mobile computer and interviewed him for the admission nursing assessment. It would be nice to report that the assessment was rapid, complete, and trouble-free, but his nurse struggled with the assessment, tabbing through fields that weren't applicable to him and requiring assistance from the charge nurse when the laptop crashed midassessment.

Fortunately, she recovered the data, but all in all, an assessment that should have taken about 45 minutes ended up taking about twice as long, due to the layout of the screens for data entry (a design issue), the nurse's lack of familiarity with the system (a training issue), and the system crash (a technology issue).

There's still work left to do to fully realize the potential benefits of an EHR, but we're getting there. If you work in a care provider setting, what are you doing to promote the successful implementation of EHRs in your own workplace? How can AHIMA assist you in moving forward?

Planning for the Future

In March AHIMA will hold Winter Team Talk meetings in four cities around the country. A virtual team talk will also be hosted online, as close as your Internet-connected desktop. This is our opportunity to discuss future directions of our profession and our association. These meetings are also a chance to do some networking. There's no cost to register, and you can even earn some continuing education credits. (For more information, go to the State Leaders and House of Delegates Community of Practice at www.ahima.org.)

AHIMA will also be holding Capitol Hill Day on March 15 in Washington, DC. This is a not-to-be-missed chance to meet your elected representatives in Washington and advocate for legislative changes that benefit our profession and the healthcare system. (For more information, see "Advocate for HIM at Hill Day" in the column "HIM in 2005: The Midst of the Storm" (*Journal of AHIMA* 77(2):20.) I hope to see you there.

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Article citation:

Dennis, Jill Callahan. "EHR, PHR Benefits: Proof is Use" *Journal of AHIMA* 77, no.2 (February 2006): 8.

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