

Harnessing the Power of PHRs

Save to myBoK

By Rita Bowen, MA, RHIA, CHPS, SSGB

If you have ever had to coordinate care for yourself or a loved one, you know that the personal health record (PHR) is a powerful tool.

Five years ago when my dad was receiving treatment for bone cancer, it became painfully obvious that the healthcare system within our community was not patient-centric. Having detailed records in a PHR helped guide various visits with specialists so my family didn't forget important details.

My father would have received the wrong medication dose during one visit to the infusion center had it not been for the information contained in his PHR. The center was working from a "shadow" record rather than the system's integrated online patient record.

After my father passed away, my mother traveled with me to Denver for AHIMA's annual convention. While visiting Colorado, she experienced what was called sudden adult death syndrome. The quick action of EMT services and hospital personnel who accepted a flash drive with her PHR resulted in a positive outcome.

Had it not been for the PHR I am sure that in my state of shock I would have been a poor historian and unable to provide the detail needed to the caregivers. It would have been impossible to contact the physicians in Georgia and Tennessee who were treating my mother to obtain the necessary information in a timely fashion.

I share these stories to demonstrate the positive outcomes that PHRs can reap.

Integrating PHRs into Our Systems

I am sure you, too, have had similar experiences. We must share these stories and continue to educate the public on the need for maintaining PHRs and help facilities understand the value of accommodating the receipt of this patient information.

Evaluate your own work setting. Do you have policies that allow staff to accept information stored on a flash drive? I was shocked my own work setting was unwilling to accept a flash drive for fear of exposing the computer system to a virus. Determine if staff understand what to do with PHR information used during the care process, whether paper or electronic.

Consumer health information systems can improve a patient's quality of life, activate patient self-care, and promote more efficient use of healthcare. Take, for example, the VA system, which is recognized for leadership in clinical informatics and performance improvement.

The VA cares for more patients with proportionally fewer resources and sets national benchmarks in patient satisfaction for 18 indicators of quality in disease prevention and treatment. It does this by harnessing the power of patient-centered information.

We must reassess the resources needed to leverage improved patient care and focus on the patient's role in maintaining his or her health and responding to disease. Our collective focus must be on the systems to support the health information needs of healthcare consumers rather than providers.

We must continue our efforts to make the right information available to the right people at the right time. This shift of focus toward patient-centric information will, hopefully, result in improvements in health maintenance and healthcare delivery.

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Driving the Power of Knowledge

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