The case for electronic health records in Canada

In a world where a Web search engine can deliver thousands of pages of information in a fraction of a second, it’s hard to believe that in this day and age we are still sending health information through paper files from doctors to hospitals to clinics to pharmacies across Canada. But it’s true.

And, when you compound that with other factors — an aging and rapidly growing population; shifts in care settings; consumers demanding more, faster and the increased pressures on health resources — quality health care will be highly dependent on fast and accurate information exchange.

The creation of electronic health records for Canadians will set the foundation for a significantly improved and modern healthcare system. For over a decade, managers and providers of the current healthcare system have been driving for this change. The good news is that we are well on our way.

**Did You Know?**

In Canada, there are 2,000 healthcare transactions every minute
In one year there are:
• 440 million laboratory tests
• 382 million prescriptions
• 322 million office-based physician visits
  (94% result in handwritten paper records)
• 35 million diagnostic images
• 2.8 million in-patient hospitalizations

Every transaction requires documentation and information exchange.
At Canada Health Infoway, we’ve consulted healthcare providers, governments, IT industry representatives and patients from across the country — healthcare providers, governments, the IT industry and patients — to understand what they expect from the healthcare system. First and foremost, we understand that any changes implemented, must work for everyone.

In general, patients’ expectations of the healthcare system are straightforward. Be there when I need it. Treat me with dignity and respect. Value my time. Keep me informed and allow me to become involved in my healthcare decisions.

For patients, this means:

- Give me accurate information that moves with me no matter who I’m seeing
- Communicate clearly with each other, so that my doctors, clinicians, hospitals and therapists have the same information
- Protect my privacy
- Allow me to have input into decisions that affect my health
- Eliminate undue risk
- Give me timely access and results

Doctors and clinicians seeking improvements

Healthcare professionals live with the system every day. More than anyone, they understand the capabilities of modern day medicine and want to see it applied in the best interests of their patients.

They also understand the inefficiencies that exists and are actively looking for new care delivery models that are practical and supportive of their patients’ needs.

They know that the most successful clinical practice teams are those that have accurate evidence-based information when they need it. That’s what electronic health records provide.
Electronic health records provide the foundation

Electronic health records will tie together a patient's health information from numerous systems to provide one coherent record for an authorized healthcare provider. Whether the information flows from a doctor's office, a clinic, hospital or pharmacy, it will appear in a structured format on the record. That way, anyone who has authorization to view it, gets a complete and accurate picture.

We've all heard stories of files being lost causing tests to be redone or undue waits at a drug store while the pharmacist confirms information with a doctor. The creation of electronic health records will give us a modern healthcare system that is safer, more efficient and more sustainable for years to come.

For more information:

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