



Ways Digital Records Help Patients *i.e. You & Me*

by Russell N. Suzuki

My team and I specialize in helping doctors get rid of their old paper charts by installing all the hardware and software needed to convert to an electronic medical records (EMR) system. When people learn what we do, I'm often asked, "I can see how EMRs and computers help doctors be more efficient, but how do these systems help me as a patient?"

This is the point in the conversation when I light up and say, "I'm glad you asked!" It's also the exact moment when you might see my wife roll her eyes, knowing I'm about to recite my "Five Ways EMRs Help Patients (i.e. You and Me)."

While she may occasionally grow tired of hearing me repeat them, we have both seen first-hand how these five benefits of EMR are driving major improvements in the quality and cost of health care here in Nevada.

EMRs save lives. Major studies have determined preventable medical errors cause between 44,000 - 98,000 deaths every year in America. That's more deaths than result from breast cancer, AIDS and even traffic-related fatalities. Many of these deaths can be avoided through widespread adoption of EMRs, which ensure each patient's medical history, past procedures, and current medications are all accessible and legible. If a doctor happens to prescribe a medicine that you are allergic to, many EMRs will automatically display a cautionary alert.

EMRs are more private and secure. Unlike paper medical records, EMRs are password-protected against inappropriate access and usage. EMR access by each staff member is logged and time-stamped. This audit trail, paired with current state and federal medical privacy laws, helps ensure only the professionals directly involved in your medical care are looking at your information. And when properly backed up by companies like mine, your digital charts cannot be

destroyed by theft, fire or flood, as thousands of paper charts were throughout New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina.

Paper medical records are costly inefficient dinosaurs. Paper charts are extremely labor-intensive to pull, copy and file, and take up valuable office space. Studies have actually determined each paper chart in your doctor's office costs around \$7 to initially create, and \$5 every time it is pulled off the shelf and later re-filed. These labor and materials costs are ultimately passed on to you, the patient, in the form of medical bills, co-pays and insurance premiums. That's something to think about next time you see entire walls covered by paper charts at your doctor's office!

EMRs make life more convenient. With the ePrescribing functionality built into many EMRs, your physician can prescribe your needed medications right from his laptop computer. The system will also tell the doctor if your medication is covered by your insurance company, saving you lots of headaches. Best of all, even before you can leave your doctor's office, your medicine can already be waiting for you at your preferred pharmacy.

EMRs improve the quality of your medical care. The best EMRs will support your physician's proactive management of your health through health maintenance reminders and other decision support tools. Such systems will alert your physician when you are due for preventative tests like mammograms and prostate exams, for your annual flu shot, and your child's immunizations. Many EMRs can also visually graph your key vital signs over time, letting your physician better track and manage such things as your weight and cholesterol levels.

These five benefits are actually just scratching the surface of what EMRs can do for patients and physicians here in Nevada and across the country. That's why the federal

government has allocated up to \$64,000 in stimulus funds to be paid to each physician who demonstrates the meaningful usage of a certified EMR like Allscripts MyWay. So if you happen to be standing next to my wife and me the next time someone asks, "Why should my doctor convert to digital charts?" please feel free to rattle off an abridged version of the above list. I'm sure my wife would love to hear someone else besides me, for once!



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