

Are You Ready for Electronic Personal Health Records?

READY OR NOT, HERE THEY COME...

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There is a revolution taking place in the world of online personal health records (PHRs) that has probably escaped your notice. In February 2008, Google and Microsoft launched competing online PHR programs within three days of one another.¹ If you aren't familiar with these services, you should be, as they undoubtedly will affect not only how your patients track their health, but also the manner in which you interact with them in the coming months and years.

At the very least, take a quick tour of what's involved with each program.²⁻³ Google Health (www.google.com/health) and Microsoft's HealthVault (www.healthvault.com) are free online health record services that offer numerous features, including the ability to:

- track conditions, medications, allergies, procedures, test results and immunizations;
- view medical histories;
- learn about your conditions(Google only);
- import medical records from providers;
- get information on potential drug interactions (Google only);
- plug in readings from various health and fitness devices into your record (HealthVault only);
- explore health services; and
- find a doctor.

On the somewhat disturbing side, on Google Health, the treatment recommendations for back pain don't even consider chiropractic as an option. The recommendations note the following:

- "The majority of nonspecific back pain is probably caused by muscle strain. This usually responds to 2-5 days of rest and pain medications (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory agents - ibuprofen, naproxen, aspirin, etc.), followed by gradual return to activities. Medications may be needed to reduce muscle spasms."
- "Physical therapy is often prescribed to instruct the patient on proper body mechanics (such as good posture and lifting correctly) and to improve strength and flexibility in the spine, abdomen, and legs."
- "Surgery is not useful for the treatment of nonspecific back pain."

If you think this is another Web promise soon to be broken, you may want to think again. Just a few months ago, Blue Cross Blue Shield (BC/BS) of Massachusetts announced a partnership with Google Health that "will expand options for members who want to create their own personal health record."⁴ And while it is the first health insurance company to sign such an agreement, there is obviously interest in the insurance industry. Under this partnership, BC/BS members will be able to "import their claims data into their Google Health profile safely and securely."

Online personal health records are obvious choices in a society in which people increasingly utilize numerous providers and health care approaches to manage their health. It will not be too long before patients will ask you for data or information to upload into their PHR, or, better yet, ask *you* to add their most current information directly to their file. (Will this mark the end of health history forms?) Needless to say, whatever you upload will be shared with your patient's health insurance company and other health care providers.

Eventually, your patients will be interested to know if you are able to interface their chiropractic care information with their PHR. And while there doesn't appear to be a format specifically for chiropractic care (at least not right now), you will want to present your findings and your care in a manner that can be reviewed and respected by other providers.

This is just the beginning. You can anticipate numerous advancements in the area of online personal health records over the next three to five years. Staying current on these advancements will keep your practice integrated in the ever-evolving health care system.

References

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3. www.healthvault.com/Industry/index.html
4. "Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Signs Agreement to Integrate with Google." Reuters, June 12, 2008.

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