

Why You Need a Personal Health Record

Robert went to bed expecting to commute to work the next morning, as always. But a call from his brother in the middle of the night changed those plans. Twelve hours later Robert found himself 2,000 miles from home in the community hospital where his father lay unconscious from a possible heart attack. Within minutes of his arrival a nurse approached him with a clipboard asking questions about his father's general health, medications, allergies, and health insurance information. Robert was at a loss to answer any of the questions. And worse, he wasn't even sure whom to contact to get the information he needed.

Overnight, literally, Robert

had become a caregiver for his father. But unfortunately he was not prepared for his new role. His first task, providing vital health information to the hospital staff, had become a nightmarish experience. Instead of spending those precious hours at his father's bedside while he hung in the balance between life and death, Robert was making multiple phone calls to extended family and friends trying to find out his father's medical history. Yet, all of this effort to retrieve his father's health information, not to mention the added stress, could have been avoided had Robert or his father created a personal health record (PHR).

What is a personal health record?

A personal health record is a tool that allows you to secure the most important information about your or your loved one's health. It is created and maintained by you to be a comprehensive overview of your loved one's health. Most people can provide some of this personal health information from memory, but not all of it. For example, can you recall the exact date of your last tetanus shot or your last physical exam? How about the results of your latest blood tests? Not many people carry those details in their heads. Yet that information can be very important if you switch doctors,

become unable to respond, end up in the emergency room or your loved one suddenly turns ill.

How can a personal health record help you?

There are many reasons for making the effort to create a personal health record. Here are three:

Saves you time. When you need answers to questions about your loved one's healthcare, the information is at your fingertips. No more calling your doctor's office to request a paper file, scrambling to find old prescriptions, or searching for your health insurance information. You have immediate access to all of this information in one place. You maintain and update these records as needed.

Improves the quality of your care. A personal health record can better help healthcare providers make diagnoses, prescribe medications, and monitor treatment plans. A personal health record is especially useful for those managing chronic conditions such as diabetes. Many chronic conditions require close and continuous tracking of lab and test results, treatment plans, medications, office visits and other information. A personal health record acts as an ongoing journal to record these facts.

Helps you better manage your loved one's care. As a caregiver, a personal health record of your loved one's situation can make your job much easier. Keeping your own complete, updated and easily accessible health record means you can play a more active role in your loved one's healthcare. Plus, it allows

What should a personal health record contain?

- Personal information such as name, birth date and Social Security number
- Contact information of doctors, dentists and specialists
- Current medications and doses
- Medical conditions and surgeries
- Immunizations and their dates
- Allergies
- Test results
- Emergency contact information
- Health insurance information
- Living wills and advance directives
- Organ donation authorization
- Eye and dental records
- Hereditary conditions in your family history
- Permission forms for release of information, operations, and other medical procedures
- It can also include any information that you think affects your or your loved one's health, including information that your doctor may not have, such as your exercise routines, dietary habits, or health goals you have set and any progress you are making toward achieving those goals.

you to have this information available when traveling or to quickly educate other caregivers tending to your loved one.

Getting started: Gathering your health information

Some of the data you will need to include in your personal health record will be easy to locate and list, such as names and phone numbers of healthcare providers, emergency contacts and facts about your health insurance. But for other information, such as immunizations, lab results, and eye and dental records, you will need the help of your healthcare providers.

Attorney Denise Pozen, creator of So Tell Me...®, personal health organizers, suggests talking to all of your healthcare providers to get the necessary information. This would include your primary care doctor, dentist, eye doctor and any specialists you or your loved one sees. You should also consult

your pharmacist about medications you are taking to get the proper names and doses. Pozen also suggests including a copy of any medical directive or living will in your PHR.

When contacting healthcare providers you can request copies of your medical records to be sent to you. You will most likely have to sign an "authorization for release of information" form before the facility will copy the records. In most cases you will incur a fee for the practice to copy and mail the documents. Your healthcare provider is allowed to charge a reasonable fee for this service. But it may also save you a lot of time trying to track down this information.

If you are trying to obtain records for a parent who you are caring for, have the person you are caring for submit written authorization to his or her doctors and healthcare facilities. In that authorization, your loved one should include language that gives

More reasons you need a PHR?

No centralized database to access your health information. In an accident, do you think emergency room doctors could get vital information about you? Twenty-five percent of Americans think so—but in fact, almost no emergency rooms can actually retrieve your critical health information.

To avoid duplicate procedures. Do specialists ask you to have blood tests or X-rays repeated, even though your regular doctor recently ordered them? Experts say that up to ten percent of the tests that doctors order are unnecessary or duplicative.

Doctors are not using electronic records. Do you think your doctor keeps your medical information on a computer? Forty percent of Americans think so—but only five percent of doctors actually do.

permission to release all information regarding treatment and care to you, and/or anyone else the patient wants to have access.

This document might also include the names of people the information should NOT be shared with. An example might be a domestic abuse case where the wife would request that a husband not have access to any information. Then you'll need to give this authorization to the healthcare facility's Health Information Management Department.

In cases of lengthy or permanent incapacity, a legal guardian for the patient may be appointed through court proceedings. In that case, the legal guardian can access the patient's health records and decide who else can see them.

How do I create my PHR?

Your personal health record can be as simple as a file folder of pertinent records kept in your home office, or it can be maintained through one of several easy-to-use tools that are available in print or online. The following is a small sampling of what is available to help you create your own PHR.

Print options

Personal Health Care Passport (PHCP). This easy-to-use spiral-bound organizer allows you to record and manage important medical information and coordinate better care for your loved one. The PHCP is a portable booklet light enough to



hang on a refrigerator with a magnet (for quick retrieval in case of emergency) and is easily carried in a purse to doctor appointments, emergency room visits, the pharmacy or when traveling. It allows you to document recent changes in health, symptoms, treatments and medications. For more information, visit www.kahnhealthcare.com.

The So Tell Me...® This comprehensive personal health organ-

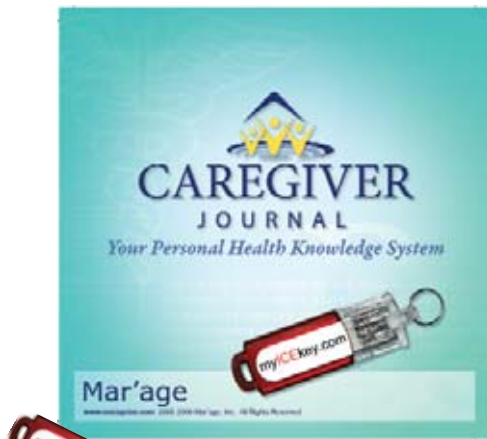
izer is a portable binder system that allows you to organize and update all aspects of your medical history and health information. It uses preprinted forms to maintain a completely customizable record of your loved one's health. The system can be paired with your



choice of binders which includes a zipper binder with pockets, pen, pocket pages, legal pad and more. For information, visit www.sotellme-organizer.com.

Computer/online options

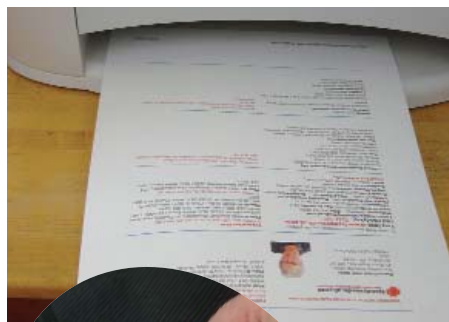
Mar'age PC-based health journals. With a PC-based health journal, you record and maintain the information on your own computer with the help of sophisticated software that prompts you to fill in the spaces with your loved one's information. Mar'age offers two software solutions: The Personal Health Journal and The Caregiver Journal which are available as separate programs. The Personal




Health Journal and Caregiver Journal both enable the user to record extensive health information. The Caregiver Journal enables you to also develop a number of reports that can be used to communicate with healthcare providers. The entire personal health record can then be uploaded to a portable USB flash drive that can be carried with you to doctor appointments or easily accessed in the event of an emergency. For information, visit www.marageinc.com.

Handy medical emergency cards. In an emergency, time and information are critical. Handy

Medical provides an online form that can be accessed on the Internet where you insert your loved one's information into the form and then print as many fold-out emergency cards as you need. These cards can then be carried in a wallet or purse and used whenever necessary. You can update your information as often as you wish and print new cards in seconds. For more information, visit www.handymedical.com.



The future of medical records

Health officials have been saying for years that we need a national database where patients' medical records are stored and updated by doctors, hospitals and pharmacists as healthcare services are used. But the two biggest obstacles that keep such a database from becoming a reality are cost and security. Who will pay for such a massive undertaking and how can your personal information be protected? Until those questions are answered, which will undoubtedly take a number of years, your next-best option is to create and maintain your own personal health record. It requires a small investment of time at the front end to gather and record your information, but is relatively easy to maintain once it is in place. And the payoff for you and your loved one could translate into better healthcare, clearer communication with your healthcare professionals and the peace of mind that you are prepared in the event of an emergency. 

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