

Keeping good records can be key to health

BY LINDA L. KLOSS

Despite all that is up for discussion in health care this year, there remain a few issues about which there can be little debate.

One is the growing influence of information technology on most every element of our evolving health-care delivery system. Another is the need for health-care consumers to have a more detailed interest and proactive involvement in the care they and their loved ones receive. And the best starting place for consumers to improve personal health care is by building and maintaining a personal health record, or PHR.

PHRs are, today, still foreign to most people, no matter how involved they may be in today's health delivery system — an irony

with the potential for the worst possible consequences. That's because the more health-care services a person consumes, the greater their need to maintain a comprehensive system that catalogs and manages the information accumulated throughout medical treatment processes.

When properly built and regularly maintained, PHRs contain everything health-care consumers need to “manage” their health as well as their health care. It gives patients — or their loved ones — the necessary power to make important health-care-related decisions. And not just important medical decisions, but almost any decision that impacts one's medical care, including treatment options, pricing and quality.

PHRs bring together all of the critical information about you — or a family member — to make you a far more engaged, and therefore a far more effective, health-care consumer.

PHRs allow people with chronic conditions to travel with the security of their health histories but free from the worries and discomforts of unnecessary tests and delayed or missed diagnoses should they fall ill away from home. They allow caregivers of seriously ill loved ones far more time to spend giving bedside care, or simply getting some rest, and far less time searching for insurance forms, prescription dosages or misplaced test results.

PHRs are also an ideal solution for the memory challenges of

otherwise healthy seniors and the multiple challenges of mothers raising young children.

There is in America today a revised concept of “consumer awareness” that covers more and comprehends better the information we use to make just about all of our purchase decisions. Nowhere is this new paradigm more important than in the collection, organization and utilization of our personal health information.

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