



FACING FORWARD

The Electronic Future of Health Care

**By Joel Abrams, President and CEO
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In August of this year, Governor Patrick signed into law a bill designed to control health costs and improve patient care, including the promotion of the electronic health record (EHR). President-elect Obama has pledged to spend \$10 billion over 5 years to move American health care onto an electronic system, including an EHR. So what is an electronic health record?

At the simplest level, it's your medical record in a computer file rather than on paper. But it is much more than that. The EHR becomes the central source for billing information, specialist referrals, lab tests, and prescription orders. By doing so, it can save money and assure patient safety. It saves money because information doesn't have to be transcribed onto paper in order to be processed. Claims are handled by fewer people, are processed faster, contain far fewer errors, and are paid electronically. Paper file storage is greatly reduced. Your provider saves money, and this helps lower costs for all of us. Oh, and yes, it saves trees.

Patient safety is also greatly improved because the information your provider puts into your record is exactly what gets transmitted to others. No longer does your pharmacist need to decipher your doctor's chicken scratch on a prescription pad. And any allergies or other conditions you have, or other prescriptions you are taking that might interact badly with the new medication, can be caught before you suffer a negative reaction.

At Dorchester House, we have implemented an electronic health record, and it has already proven to be a major benefit to our patients. For example: E-Scribing. This means that we transmit prescriptions to all pharmacies electronically, directly from the medical record. For you, as a consumer of health services, this means that (a) the prescription your pharmacist reads is the same as what your doctor wrote, and (b) it is at the pharmacy, ready and waiting for you when you get there.

We have really only just begun. The real value of the electronic record is in its ability to offer quality medicine – quality that as a consumer you can review along with the experts. You will be able to gain access to your own health information from your home computer to check on lab test results, to make appointments or to refill prescriptions.

Another exciting development that we can look forward to soon is the Clinical Information Exchange (CIE) in which patient information stored anywhere can be available and accessible to patients and their health care providers everywhere. Not only can the CIE save costs, it can save lives.

Imagine the following: You are on vacation 3,000 miles away from home, say California, and you are involved in a car accident. The emergency responders are transporting you by ambulance to the nearest trauma center. You arrive, and the EMT from the ambulance tells the doctor about the accident and your injuries, the doctor accesses key information about you from the CIE, sees your essential medical history, the results of important lab tests you had, when you received your last tetanus booster, your allergy to penicillin, and even that you had a flu shot before you left. With this information in hand the doctor can provide you with safe and comprehensive care. This may sound futuristic to you, but it is already happening in selected parts of the country, including here in Massachusetts. With today's internet technology, computerized health information need only be a few clicks away.

Of course, there are concerns about privacy and the safety of the information that is kept on computers, and security is a top priority. In fact, the protection of personal health information is an essential part of Federal law, helping to insure that the future of our health care system is increasingly secure and electronic. I am proud to say that Dorchester House, with its electronic health record in place, is ready for the future.

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