PERSONAL HEALTH RECORDS:
WHAT HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS NEED TO KNOW

As a health care provider, you use information every day to diagnose and treat your patients. But once your patients leave the exam room or the hospital, they become responsible for staying healthy each day.

Patients today are expected to know more about their health, and to engage actively in their own care. Often, family members and friends are also involved in the caretaking process.

There are a variety of health information technology tools in place to help your patients and their caregivers with this responsibility. One of these tools is the personal health record, or "PHR."

Properly designed and implemented, PHRs can help patients manage their health information and become full partners in the quest for good health.

What Is the Difference Between a PHR and an EHR?

- Information in an electronic health record or "EHR" is typically entered by and accessed by health care providers. It may only have information from one health care provider or a group practice.

- A PHR is a record controlled by the individual and may include health information from a variety of sources, including multiple health care providers and the patients themselves. The PHR is separate from, and does not replace the legal record of any health care provider.

How Do Patients Get PHRs?

Electronic PHRs are increasingly being offered to patients through health plans health care providers, employers, and independent vendors. These tools offer a wide variety of features for obtaining, storing, and understanding health information.

What Is a Personal Health Record?

A personal health record is a collection of information pertinent to a patient's health. A PHR may include:

- Contact information for the patient and his or her family members

- A list of providers involved in the patient's care

- Diagnosis list

- Medications list

- Allergy list

- Immunization history

- Lab and test results

- Family medical history

Standalone PHRs

Some PHRs are standalone PHRs: patients fill in the information from their own records and memories and the data is stored on the patients' computers or on the internet. Patients can decide whether to share the information with providers, family members, or anyone else involved in their care. In some cases, information can be downloaded from other sources into the PHR.

Tethered, Connected PHRs

Other PHRs are linked to a specific health care organization's EHR system or a health plan's information system. The patient accesses the information through a secure portal. Typically, patients can view information such as lab results, immunization history or due dates for certain screenings. These are called tethered PHRs or connected PHRs. When a PHR is connected to the patient's legal medical record it is protected under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA) Privacy Rule.

How Can Using a PHR Help Your Patients Manage Their Care?

Having important health information—immunization records, lab results, etc.—in electronic form makes it easy for patients to update records and share them with other people who need it, including their health care providers and family members.

 Talk to your patients about how a PHR can help with aspects of their medical care, including:

- **Emergency Care or Care While Traveling:** Online PHRs can give health care providers valuable information on a patient in case of an emergency or if the patient requires care while traveling.

- **Chronic Disease Management:** Patients who have one or more chronic conditions may use a PHR monitor and record symptoms and test results (such as blood pressure or blood sugar readings). PHRs can help them track lab results, which may motivate them to adhere to your treatment plan.

- **Care Coordination:** If a patient's PHR includes information from all or many health care providers, it can help them receive better coordinated care.

- **Family Health Management:** People who manage health care for family members —such as young children, elderly parents, and spouses—often find it difficult to keep track of doctor's appointments and immunizations for several people. Having a system for tracking and updating that information can help the caregiver coordinate screenings and vaccinations that prevent illness or lead to earlier diagnosis and better outcomes.

- **Secure communications:** Some PHRs offer a secure way for your patients to communicate with you and their other health care providers over the Internet. This can be a fast and efficient way to exchange certain types of non-urgent information—such as routine prescription requests and updates on a chronic condition.

- **Ease-of-use:** PHRs are designed for use by patients. PHRs can help patients take care of themselves and their family members.

For More Information About Personal Health Records, visit:

Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology website, http://healthit.hhs.gov/PHR

Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services website, https://www.cms.gov/PerHealthRecords/

The Office of Civil Rights and the HIPPA Privacy Rule website, http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/privacy