

Power to the Patients, Freedom to the Physicians

BY VERNA GATES

When Dad showed up at his grandson's office confused about where he intended to go, his three children began the mad scramble to find out the cause. Despite all their efforts, they couldn't even get a solid list of all his doctors, much less his medications. Situations like this occur daily, prompting President Bush to issue an initiative to get most personal health records in electronic form in the next 10 years. The question is, who controls the records?



For the Southern Medical Association, the answer is simple: the patient. This professional association of physicians recently partnered with WebSafe, Inc., an Alabama based company that provides secure online, patient controlled records storage. In a feature called MyMedSafe, patients can compile their own health records and grant access to family members and medical personnel with special codes. A wallet sized card keeps a code handy in case of emergencies.

“MyMedSafe is basically a place where you can plug your current medications, supplements you take, surgeries you've had, blood type, etc., rather than sticking it in a cabinet in your house where it isn't doing you any good. The desk drawer doesn't work anymore, and who really keeps it up that well any way? People spend more time in front of computers, and they are easy to update,” said Randy Glick, Southern Medical Association's chief information officer.

For physicians, the burden of keeping complete health records shifts to the patient, who can bring in a printout which accurately summarizes your current health situation and history, along with a complete list of immunizations and allergies. An interface guides the patient through a series of questions, making it easy to post a medical history.

Even MRIs and X-rays can be posted in WebSafe. The patient and doctor can access the site from an office computer and discuss the images. A physician can also request other opinions by posting the images and granting a limited code, with patient permission, to consulting experts anywhere in the world.

“It is a wonderful communication tool between patients and physicians,” said Glick.

With an access code, physicians can also post test results right on a patient's MyMedSafe account, saving hours of staff time in phone calls. The system will automatically alert the patient about the posting.

“Sending an email is not a secure transmission for sensitive information. But the MyMedSafe test posting is secure and can only be seen by a person with an access code,” said Don Moore, development director for WebSafe.

Medical directives pose another issue for families and physicians. Living wills, medical power of attorney and do not resuscitate orders can be posted and pulled up on any Internet connected computer, giving families peace of mind in emergencies and during critical times. Insurance policies can also be secured on the site.

WebSafe accounts can also benefit the physician's practice. The secure site can be set up to back up the

practice management system nightly. This automatic service tucks away records in case of that thunderstorm in the night.

“Self-recorded CDs may last no more than two years. Depending on how they were recorded and stored, they may deteriorate quickly and can be destroyed by water and fire. By backing up to our storage system, it’s always available, and always up to date, and no floppies which you can no longer fit into a new computer,” said Moore.

Even when a physician travels, he can post itineraries and emergency numbers so he can be reached. If a patient needs emergency care, he can access their records, look at the latest MRI scan from his hotel computer, and offer opinions from Tahiti. For his own safety, he can securely post passports, tickets and credit card numbers in case a wallet or purse comes up missing.

To encourage physicians to sign up their patients, SMA and WebSafe are offering incentives in the form of commissions. The system is affordable for every patient, as an individual MyMedSafe account site costs about the same as a co-pay: \$29 per year. For families of older patients or special needs children, the service is especially critical.

Physicians can also get discounted personal sites, which they can use for their own records: from health to wealth.

“You can file anything on WebSafe that you can put into a drawer: financial records, pictures, mortgage documents, whatever you may need to keep safe,” said Moore.

With medical identity fraud a growing problem, the site is securely encrypted during transmission, retrieval and storage. Each account is password protected, so the patient can be certain private information remains private. WebSafe’s technology is HACKER SAFE certified and meets the highest security scanning standards of the U.S. government.

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