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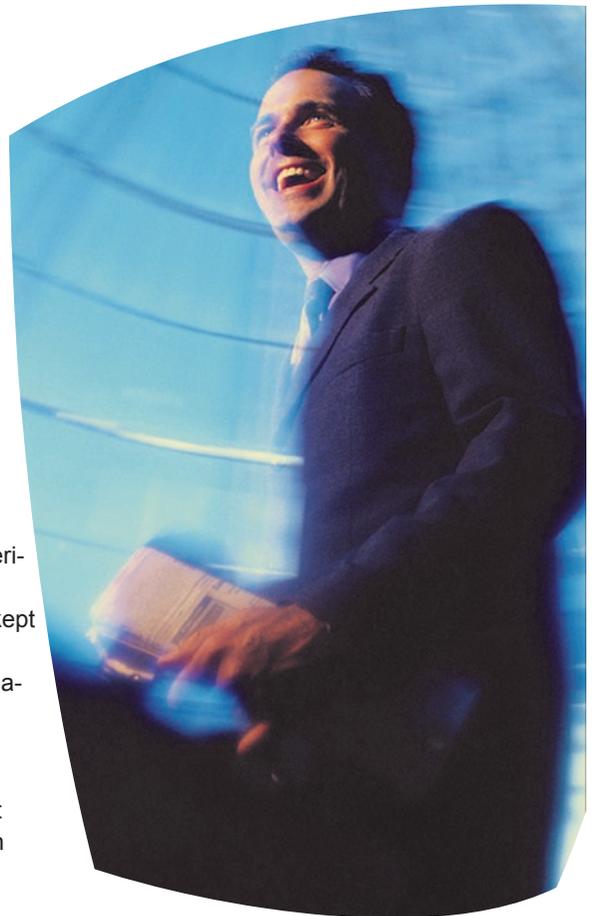


▶ ELECTRONIC MEDICAL RECORDS3

Medical records

PROVIDING EXCELLENT MEDICAL CARE REQUIRES EXCELLENT RECORD KEEPING. **WHY?** BECAUSE GOOD RECORD KEEPING ENSURES CONTINUITY OF MEDICAL CARE, FULFILS MEDICO-LEGAL REQUIREMENTS AND IS PROFESSIONAL!

Your organisation might have set standards that you are expected to meet regarding the content and structure of medical records. If not, or if you are in private practice, you should refer to guidance developed by relevant professional bodies and associations in South Africa.



Managing Medical Records

- Medical records can be defined as any relevant record made by a health practitioner at the time of or subsequent to a consultation and/or examination or the application of health management. A medical record contains the information about the health of an identifiable individual recorded by a health practitioner, either personally or at his/her direction.
- Good records management makes everybody's life easier and facilitates continuity of care, reducing the risk of adverse incidents through misplaced or untraceable records.

HPCSA Guidelines Retention of Medical Records

Medical records should be stored in a safe place.

- Records should be stored for a period of not less than six years
- Minors under 18 - records to be kept until 21st birthday
- Mentally incompetent patients - patient's lifetime
- Occupational health records - 20 years after treatment
- Provincial Health Institutions must retain records in accordance to an approved file plan.





WHAT ARE ELECTRONIC MEDICAL RECORDS?

Digital records kept at a doctor's office, an insurance company or the facilities where there are patients, are called EHRs (electronic health records) or EMRs (electronic medical records.) Both names are used interchangeably.

EMR systems are intended to keep track of a patient's entire health and medical history in a computerized, electronic format. By keeping these potentially vast records in this manner, they are more easily retrievable, and can make a patient's navigation through the healthcare system much safer and more efficient.

EMRs have not been adopted nearly so quickly as one might expect. Lack of standardization, and issues of security and privacy have stood in the way of their implementation.

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Electronic Medical Records

"..it is hoped that doctors will have all the information they need at the exact time and place they need it and computerised decision support will ensure that they use the information to make and implement correct decisions..."

Benefits of using Electronic Medical Records

Just like any other record keeping system, moving patients' records from paper and physical filing systems to computers and their super storage capabilities creates great efficiencies for patients and their providers, as well as health payment systems.

Efficiency isn't the only benefit though. For individual patients, access to good care becomes easier and safer when records can easily be shared. Important information such as blood type, prescribed drugs, medical conditions and other aspects of our medical history can be accounted for much more quickly. At the very least, an existing electronic medical record (EMR) can save time at the doctor's office. At most, quick access to our records can be lifesaving if an emergency occurs and answers to those questions are needed during the emergency decision-making process. Money is saved by using electronic medical records; not just the cost of paper and file folders, but the cost of labor and space, too. In any business, time equals money. The efficiencies created by simply typing a few identifying keystrokes to retrieve a patient's record - as opposed to staring at thousands of file folders, filing and refilling them saves a doctor's practice or a hospital many thousands of rands. That's even taking the cost of the electronic system into account.



More benefits of EMR systems:

- Improvement in legibility of clinical notes
- Decision support for drug ordering, including allergy warnings and drug incompatibilities
- Reminders to prescribe drugs and administer vaccines
- Warnings for abnormal laboratory results
- Support for programme monitoring, including reporting outcomes, budgets and supplies
- Support for clinical research
- Management of chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and heart failure



Legal Requirements

To ensure an appropriate and consistent level of information security for computer-based patient records, both within individual healthcare organizations and throughout the entire healthcare delivery system, healthcare organizations are required to establish formal information security programs, for example through the adoption of the ISO 17799 standard. However, proper information security management practices alone, do not necessarily ensure regulatory compliance.

South African health care organizations have to comply with the South African National Health Act SANHA) and the Electronic Communication Transaction Act (ECTA). It is arguably necessary to consider compliance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) in order to meet international industry standards.

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