

Electronic Medical Records

COMMON QUESTIONS

- Are electronic medical records beneficial?
- Is the privacy of the person with dementia appropriately protected in electronic medical records?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The use of electronic medical records has become a focus in health care as a way to improve quality and safety. A major concern is maintaining the privacy and the security of systems that keep electronic medical records. Medical information is kept confidential for many reasons, and privacy of medical records has been addressed through the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

However, a disclosure of a limited amount of information through electronic means could be beneficial. Having electronic access to certain elements of an individual's health record might be helpful to physicians, particularly when individuals are treated by many physicians. Electronic medical records would allow for efficient sharing of the person's medical history and would also allow for advance directives to be made known to treating physicians. Electronic access to medical records, including advance directives, can enhance continuity and alleviate confusion that can occur when a person with dementia is unable to state his or her wishes to the treating doctor, particularly in emergency situations.

ASSOCIATION POSITION

The Association asserts that the use of electronic medical records can be an efficient method of communicating and sharing medical information, and could be highly beneficial to individuals and the health care providers that treat them. However, it is imperative that a person's medical records are securely maintained with user identification and authentication, and that any sharing of information is appropriately authorized.

Recommendations on the use of electronic medical records include:

- Any and all electronic medical information should be reviewed at least annually by the person or their advocate.
- HIPAA authorizations should be very specific when granting authority for the access of protected health information.

- Records, advance directives and other medical documents should be maintained in a format (such as portable document format or PDF) which cannot be edited by the receiver. Electronic medical records should be maintained in such a way that information cannot be altered once rendered. New information should be added and addendums posted.
- Careful consideration should be given to whether medical records will be transmitted via e-mail, in order to guard against sending the documents to the wrong address.
- The delivery of electronic medical records needs to be performed securely, and the identities of the sender and receiver should be both verified and recorded

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