

**Frequently Asked Questions  
About Electronic Health  
Records and Health  
Information Networks**

# EMR - EHR Definition

- "Electronic Medical Record" or "EMR" when talking about Electronic Health Record (EHR) technology
- Often terms are used interchangeably
- Essentially a digitized version of the paper chart
- EHR frequently used now to refer to interoperability

# Catalyst for Change

- In the United States President Obama has called for all Americans to have EHRs by 2014.
- \$50 billion allocated over five years to support the adoption of standards-based health IT systems.

# Why?

- Cut waste
- Eliminate red tape
- Reduce the need to repeat expensive medical tests
- Save lives by reducing the deadly but preventable medical errors

# What is an electronic health record (EHR)?

- Computerized versions of paper record. (clinical, demographic and administrative data)
- May include treatment histories, medical test reports and images stored in an electronic format.
- EHR is now the preferred term because its definition includes the ability to exchange information

# What types of information might be stored on EHR?

- Anything that can be stored on paper medical records can be stored on EHRs

# What are the advantages of EHR?

- Quicker retrieval of more complete patient information
- Makes searching, tracking and analyzing information easier
- Reduced storage space
- Easier access at times of emergency
- Can be backed up

# What else can be done with EHR?

- Can trigger reminders
- Look at all test results over a five-year period and establish better profiles of each patient's health

# How secure are electronic health records?

- Must comply with the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) in regard to protecting patient privacy
- Electronic health records can be encoded so that only authorized individuals can view them

# HIPAA Privacy Rule

- A set of national standards for the protection of certain health information
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (“HHS”) issued the Privacy Rule to implement the requirement of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (“HIPAA”)
- The Privacy Rule standards address the use and disclosure of individuals’ health information—called “protected health information” by organizations subject to the Privacy Rule
- Standards for individuals' privacy rights to understand and control how their health information is used

# HIPAA Privacy Rule

## Major Goal

- Assure that individuals' health information is properly protected while allowing the flow of health information needed to provide and promote high quality health care and to protect the public's health and well being
- The Rule strikes a balance that permits important uses of information, while protecting the privacy of people who seek care and healing
- Given that the health care marketplace is diverse, the Rule is designed to be flexible and comprehensive to cover the variety of uses and disclosures that need to be addressed

# What is health information exchange (HIE)?

- The electronic movement of health-related information among organizations according to nationally recognized standard (a health information network (HIN))

# **Why would EHR/HIE lead to less duplicative medical testing and a more efficient system?**

- Physicians involved in a patient's care have all patient's data readily available, including medical tests
- Instead of repeat tests, next steps in can be taken

# How secure would an HIE be?

- System used must comply with the security provisions of HIPAA
- HIPAA is the regulatory minimum, and state laws and regulations often supersede it

# Is this a national effort?

- The federal government has set a goal for most Americans to have EHRs by 2014
- That goal includes establishing regional and national health information exchange networks that will ensure that complete health information is available for most Americans at the time and place of care, regardless of location
- The system would permit sharing information privately and securely among health care providers when authorized by each patient

# How would EHR/HIE improve patient safety?

- When any physician treating a patient at any time and in any place has access to all the patient's records, the physician can make more informed decisions based on complete information
- EHR/HIE systems can automatically alert health care professionals when there are conflicts between prescribed drugs
- When medical information is stored electronically, problems with illegible handwriting on paper records and prescriptions are eliminated

# What principles of privacy and security would be followed?

- The privacy standards in place under HIPAA also apply to electronic health information
- As health information networks offer services that directly interface with consumers, additional privacy and security standards will be put into place

# What is a RHIO?

- A RHIO is a non-governmental organization that exists as a New York State not-for-profit corporation to enable interoperable health information exchange via a common Statewide Health Information Network for New York (SHIN-NY) by participating in setting information policies through a statewide policy framework and governance process, implementing policies and ensuring adherence to such policies with a mission of governing its use in the public's interest and for the public good to improve health care quality and safety and reduce costs.
- To fulfill this mission, RHIOs require commitment from multiple health care stakeholders in a geographic region, including physicians, hospitals, long term care and home care providers, patients, insurers, purchasers and government.
- RHIOs are responsible for enabling interoperability through which individual stakeholders are linked together – both organizationally and technically through the SHIN-NY – in a coordinated manner for health information exchange and quality and population health reporting.

- [www.nyehealth.org](http://www.nyehealth.org)

- [www.healthconnections.org](http://www.healthconnections.org)