

Where in the World Are My Health Records?

A VERY long time ago most of us had one doctor, one hospital, and one pharmacy. So, we had three health records. Many times the information in one health record was not in the others. And everything was on paper. So each provider had to physically get the information from the other, substitute a verbal patient report, or repeat a test or procedure. As we have demonstrated before this “shattering” of records can cost lives, injuries, and increase expenses. In fact, research shows that the effects of having so many paper based and shattered records is causing more deaths and injuries than breast cancer or automobile accidents.

The days of having three paper based health records are long gone. Now we have lots of providers and have many health records. Where might your health records be stored now? You may have more than one of each type of provider, for instance, you may have more than one doctor or have used more than one laboratory for tests.

Below are some places where you health records might be. You might want to count to see how many places your records might be stored.

- Physician office
- Specialist office
- Local Pharmacy
- Chain pharmacy
- Mail in pharmacy
- Hospital
- Urgent care
- Laboratory (local)
- Laboratory (regional or national)
- Health Department
- Mental health provider
- Dentist
- Optometrist
- Chiropractor
- Medicaid
- Indian Health Service
- Insurance company
- Tribal health provider
- Veteran’s hospital

Providers need to have complete health records to provide the care they are trained to deliver. Within your own facility think about how much time and emphasis is put on having complete and up to date health records. How can you be successful at that if a person may have several health records scattered in the above places? And if you did a terrific job of gathering information from each source, then you would have to recheck each time you saw the patient to see if there were any new visits to the other providers since the last visit and then re-update the records over and over.

Obviously, in this day and age, gathering all of this information by mail and fax is impossible. What SMRTNET, and any other health information network does, is provide this “gathering service” for you electronically from all sources that participate in the network. Each time the network is accessed the information is updated and is therefore the most recent available. At the same time the network organizes the information. Can you imagine how you would organize the information from possibly six providers into one chart so it would all make sense? Each provider has different forms and some types of information are mixed. So for instance, a lab report, vital signs, and diagnosis might be together in one record and on three pieces of paper in another record.

So, as you can see, now that health records are “shattered” into so many places, a health information network is a necessity. The one your facility is helping to develop, called SMRTNET, is one of the most inclusive in the country so that information from as many places as possible is available to provide the best care possible for our patients.

Right now nearly forty “super-users” are testing SMRTNET. We expect it to be available to you later this fall.