Article Series Preparing for Appointments

Understanding Electronic Health Records

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A cancer diagnosis may require many appointments and tests with different doctors. Members of your care team may record this health information electronically. As you go through your cancer journey, it’s important that you understand how to access these records, as they can provide information that may help you and your care team when making decisions about your care. In this article, we’ll discuss the different types of electronic health information and how they can be helpful for you to access this information.

What are the types of electronic health information?

- There are a few different terms related to electronic health information, such as electronic medical records (EMRs), electronic health records (EHRs), and patient portals. Though these three things are different, their definitions are similar.
    - EHRs are medical documents that are shared between multiple providers and health systems, while EMRs stay with a single provider. This is where doctors will input your health information, such as visit notes or test results. These are digital versions of the patient's paper chart.
    - The way you may access your EHR or EMR is through a patient portal. Patient portals, for example MyChart, allow patients to access and review health information, communicate with their care team, view patient notes and monitor upcoming appointments.

Why do doctors use EHRs or EMRs?

- Doctors use EHRs or EMRs because they may often be more efficient than paper records.
- It allows all members of your care team to share important information quickly, keeping you (via your patient portal) and the other members of your team notified on updates to your care, like appointment status or test results.
- By keeping everyone up to date, treatment plans can be more coordinated, which can result in a smoother care journey.

What are some benefits for patients who use their patient portals?

- Patient portals may enhance communication between you and your care team.
- Further, the organization of information allows you or a member of your care team the ability to access medical records easily.
- Patient portals also may provide other important features related to your cancer care, such as:
    - Schedule non-urgent appointments
    - Request prescription refills
    - Make payments
    - Complete forms
    - Message your healthcare team
    - View test results

    - Access physician notes and appointment summaries
    - Review your medical history
    - Read educational materials
    - Receive reminders and notifications

Are there any downsides to accessing electronic health information?

- If you have opted to receive notifications, you might be able to view your results before discussing them with your doctor. this could lead to unnecessary stress or worry about interpreting the results.
- Doctors may worry about patients becoming too stressed as a result of constant, easy access to medical records.
- It is important to talk to your doctor to help you understand your health information and, if applicable, explain the next steps related to your care.

Are there tips or tricks for navigating electronic health information for patients and caregivers?

- In order to protect the privacy of your medical records, consider using a strong password to log in to your patient portal.
- If you prefer to access your patient portal on your mobile device, you may find it easier to download a mobile application, if available.
- To avoid misunderstanding results or making any assumptions about your care, talk to your doctor about your health information and any other questions you may have about your care.