Understanding
YOUR MEDICAL RECORD

AHIMA
American Health Information Management Association®
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About This Guide

**Your medical records are important.** They help you receive the right treatments, tests, drugs, and insurance payments. They also qualify as evidence in medical lawsuits.

The American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) wants you to understand your medical record, your health information, and your rights related to them.

This guide helps you understand the importance of your medical record, and encourages you to actively manage your rights to privacy and access to your records. If you are a guardian, it also helps you understand what you have the right to access and approve for those in your custody.

You can also learn how to talk to your doctor; ask questions; make changes to your record; submit a correction if you feel your record is in error; or file a complaint if you believe your record has been misused.

Finally, the guide explains the benefits of keeping your own records—known as personal health records (PHRs)—and using your doctor’s website, known as a patient portal so your healthcare experience is easier.

AHIMA recommends keeping this pamphlet [myphr.com/understanding](http://myphr.com/understanding) handy. We hope you find it useful.
What Is a Medical Record?

A medical record is a collection of information about an individual’s health condition and the healthcare they receive. This information may include a description of the person’s physical condition, results of diagnostic testing (such as x-rays or blood tests) and treatments (such as physical therapy or surgeries), and medications. Physicians, hospitals, therapists, visiting nurses, and nursing homes maintain the medical records of their review of patient conditions, their opinions, and treatments of patients in both paper and electronic formats. Some medical records may be part paper and part electronic and called either health records or medical records.

Why Are Medical Records Important to Me?

Medical records are important to you for many reasons. Medical records can be used to:

» Support reimbursement for health services provided
» Provide evidence of injury and treatment for workers’ compensation
» Provide evidence of disability for disability insurance
» Identify people who have had a specific treatment when it has been discovered that this treatment caused some adverse events
» Study disease trends to identify potential environmental or genetic causes.
» Track changes in your physical findings such as growth of a mole. Baselines are recorded so changes are recognized.
How Can You Access Your Medical Record?

**When you request a copy of your health records**, either for yourself or to be released to someone else, you may be required to provide a form of identification such as a driver’s license or state-issued identification card, so that the provider (physician office, hospital, nursing home, and so forth) is able to verify your identity as the patient in the health record being released. This is for your protection, to ensure your information does not become subject to identity theft. You will be required to sign a form that gives permission for the healthcare provider to release your information. This is required by a federal law known as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) Privacy Rule.
How Can You Change or Correct Your Medical Record?

If you look at a copy of your medical record and think something is incorrect, you may request a change or amendment to make it accurate or more complete. The first thing to do is ask your provider about the process to make an amendment in your record. You may be asked to provide your request in writing. You do not have the right to remove or alter any of the medical record documentation.

If the provider denies your request, you must be notified in writing and provided with a reason for the denial.

Usually, a parent or guardian who serves as a personal representative can request an amendment to a minor child’s record. Once the child turns 18, the parent usually does not have the right to request an amendment. There may be times when you are not allowed access or the right to amend your minor child’s medical record, such as when care is given for mental health or substance abuse.

If you are the durable power of attorney for someone or the executor or administrator of an estate, you generally have the right to request an amendment to the record. You will be asked to provide documentation of your legal status.

Mental health and substance records often have different rules regarding obtaining copies and viewing patient records. Contact the Health Information Services, Patient Advocacy Department, or Privacy Office in your hospital for more information.
How Do You File a Complaint?

If you feel it is necessary to file a privacy complaint it is important to first contact the provider who cared for you. Ask to review the Notice of Privacy Practices. The notice should list the name or title and phone number of a contact person who can help answer your questions or resolve your concerns. Your provider may have a site that offers information. You have rights under HIPAA for accessing, amending, and filing complaints. Use hhs.gov/ocr/hipaa to obtain more information.
What Is a Personal Health Record (PHR)?

The PHR is a tool used to collect, track, and share past and current information about your health or the health of someone in your care. Sometimes this information can save the cost and inconvenience of repeating routine medical tests. Even when routine procedures need to be repeated, your PHR can give medical care providers more insight into your personal health story.

Remember, you are ultimately responsible for making decisions about your health. A PHR can help you do that.

There are many good reasons for keeping a PHR.

» The PHR gives you the ability to provide doctors with useful past and current health information about yourself (current medications, family history, allergies, conditions, and so forth).

» It provides the ability to look back and recall what healthcare you received.

» It allows you to track your medical history and monitor the results of your treatment so you can more actively participate in your care.

» It helps during discussions about your health with your healthcare providers.

» It provides easy access to your health information while traveling.

» It permits you to record your progress toward specific health-related goals.

» It helps track appointments, vaccinations, and many other wellness healthcare services.
Are Personal Health Records and Medical Records the Same Thing?

Medical records contain information about your health compiled and maintained by your healthcare providers. A PHR is information about your health compiled and maintained by you. The difference rests in how you use your PHR to improve the quality of your healthcare. Medical records are legal documents. A PHR is not a legal document.

You can play an active role in your healthcare. Research has shown that when consumers actively participate in their own care, the outcomes are better. Use your PHR to assist with decision-making when it comes to potential health conditions, treatment options, costs of treatment, management of chronic conditions, healthy lifestyle choices, preventive actions, monitoring the accuracy and security of your health information, and evaluating and selecting your healthcare providers.

Many people have several different medical records. You may see multiple healthcare providers during your lifetime as well, such as a family practitioner, an allergist, a specialist such as a cardiologist, and if necessary, a surgeon. Each provider compiles a separate medical record containing information about you. In fact, even if your providers are part of the same healthcare system, they may each keep a separate medical record for you and may be unaware of the treatment you are receiving from other providers. This can lead to an incomplete and disjointed record of your health. This is why your PHR (and the way you use it) is important.
What Should Your Personal Health Record Contain?

The specific content of your health record depends on the type of healthcare you have received. Listed below are documents common to most medical and health records, as well as additional documents accompanying hospital stays or surgery.

Consider including the following items in your PHR:

» Personal identification, including name and birth date
» People to contact in case of emergency
» Names, addresses, and phone numbers of your physician, dentist, and specialists
» Health insurance information
» Living wills, advance directives, or medical power of attorney
» Organ donor authorization
» A list and dates of significant illnesses and surgical procedures
» Current medications and dosages
» Immunizations and their dates
» Allergies or sensitivities to drugs or materials, such as latex
» Important events, dates, and hereditary conditions in your family history
» Results from a recent physical examination
» Opinions of specialists
» Important tests results; eye and dental records
» Correspondence between you and your provider(s)
» Current educational materials (or appropriate web links) relating to your health
» Any information you want to include about your health—such as your exercise regimen, any herbal medications you take, and any counseling you may receive
» Dietary practices, such as whether you are vegetarian or on a temporary diet; especially if changes in your diet have produced changes in your health in the past
How Do I Compile MyPHR?

Start by obtaining copies of pertinent documents from your healthcare providers’ medical records. Find out if your provider has a plan in place for helping patients create PHRs. Ask if your records are in an accessible electronic format, or if you need to request copies. Also, ask your physician or health information management (HIM) professional to help you determine which parts of your record you need. If you want medical records kept by your health plan, contact the plan’s customer service department.

We encourage you to begin tracking your health information in whatever format works best for you, even if the choice is paper.

Once you’ve gathered your medical records, there are several different ways to maintain your PHR:

» Place it in a file folder
» Scan and transfer the information to a USB drive
» Subscribe to a Web-based service
» Regardless of the storage method, you should keep the information in a secured place or protect it by password.

You can create your own PHR, or may be offered one by a variety of sources, such as:

» Healthcare providers
» Insurers
» Employers
» Commercial PHR suppliers

Some tools are free, while others may require a fee or subscription. Each supplier has different policies and practices for using the data they store, so review the policies and procedures carefully.

Things to Consider

» The privacy and security policy
» Your ability, or the ability of those you authorize, to access your information
» Control over accessibility by others you did not authorize to see your information
What Are Patient Portals?

The patient portal is a site allowing for secure two-way communication between the patient and his or her doctor or healthcare facility. Portal services are available around the clock.

Features that may be available through a patient portal:

» Prescription refills
» Online bill payment by credit card
» Scheduling appointments
» Patient education
» Lab results
» Current medical conditions
» Current medications
» Secure e-mail communication between the patient and the physician (Asking routine follow-up questions, leaving comments)
» Some allow patients to register and complete forms online, streamlining visits to physician offices or hospitals.
» Some allow access to your full electronic health record (EHR)
» Some can upload daily monitoring readings to help doctors keep tabs on patients without dragging them into the office (glucose levels, blood pressure, and the like).
For Additional Information and Resources

Please Visit Our Site: myphr.com