

The patient's primary trust is with a personal physician, so that physician can anticipate being asked to discuss the benefits and policies of health information exchange with patients. A recent eHealth Initiative survey showed that the most persuasive message for all audiences is the powerful belief that electronically available personal health information can save lives in an emergency. Many physicians can share their personal experience of the lack of timely access to critical information at the point of care, and how it can directly impact treatment outcomes as well as the doctor-patient relationship. Educating your patient regarding the benefits of electronic health information exchange involves communicating that optimum care requires access to timely and reliable information. Your patients need to know that every precaution is taken to preserve the privacy and security of information and that policies have been established to enforce these safeguards.

The process of listening and open communication about health information exchange will continue the tradition of trust in the physician-patient relationship.

## Do my patients have a choice?

Patients have the right to ask for opt-out of any information sharing that is not required by law, the right to an audit of who has accessed their healthcare information, and the right to access their own individual healthcare information

Listen first to understand their fears and concerns. Articulate benefits at an individual patient level—tell them what health information exchange means to them and what it means to their family. Providers can emphasize the security precautions, audits and firewalls in place that make an electronic world often more secure and access more limited to appropriate uses and users than a paper system allows. However, even in systems with the highest levels of security, breaches may occur. This further emphasizes the

need for physicians and patients to be part of the development of agreed-upon privacy and security policies and enforcement procedures in health information exchange initiatives.

## Patients and Providers Working Together

A key requirement for success of the adoption of health information exchange is involvement of both healthcare providers and their patients. This exchange must be in an environment that preserves the security and privacy of personal and health information. Physicians can spell out the benefits of health information exchange to their patients—for their personal health, their families, and the community. Physicians can also be advocates for their patients' concerns through their stakeholder role in a health information exchange organization, and be involved with the development of privacy policies. Physicians can advocate for secure and private access not only by healthcare providers, but also by patients. Health information exchange is one key aspect of transforming healthcare for all Americans.

### Health Information Exchange

*Delivering*

Information  
**ST@T**

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# Health Information Exchange

## *The Physician-Patient Relationship*



### Doctors, Patients and Health Information Exchange

- ▶ Patients and physicians believe there are benefits to be gained from electronic health information exchange.
- ▶ Patients and physicians have concerns about privacy and security of electronic health information exchange.
- ▶ Patients trust their doctors with their personal health information and health decisions.

[www.ehealthinitiative.org](http://www.ehealthinitiative.org)

# Patients, Doctors and Health Information Exchange

Jane is a 45-year-old patient in your office for a general physical. At the end of the visit, she asks for your opinion on a new service offered by her employer's health plan. According to Jane, her employer now offers a personal health record that will track all her health data from health insurance and medical visits. She can even enter information herself. She would like your opinion. She wants to know if you can look at it with her during office visits or if you will be entering data. She says that not everything she tells you in the office is information she wants her employer to know.

What will you discuss with Jane regarding health information exchange?

## What is Health Information Exchange?

Health information exchange is a method to electronically move personal health and medical information securely between doctors, hospitals and other healthcare providers when it is needed for your patient's care. With consent, health information will be protected and exchanged under current medical privacy and confidentiality standard procedures. Secure electronic health information exchange allows patients and physicians to make sure that patient health information is available when and where it is needed.

This scenario highlights some of the healthcare delivery challenges and opportunities that will arise with improved health information exchange. Patients are becoming more educated and aware of the need to have access and share their personal health information with their healthcare providers. Ideally, the ability to access and share information can improve communication between providers and patients, resulting in better care outcomes, safer and more efficient care delivery and improved quality of life. However, even well informed patients can be reluctant to share their information due to privacy concerns.

## HIE and Privacy: What Do Consumers Think?

Recent research done by the eHealth Initiative shows that Americans support the creation of a national health information exchange or network for doctors and patients, and more than 70 percent are interested in a secure online personal record. The consumers in this study voiced support for health information exchange because they believe it would:

- ▶ Provide physicians with faster and more accurate medical information in emergencies.
- ▶ Allow physicians to share critical health information, decreasing medical errors in diagnosis and care.
- ▶ Enable physicians to have the most up-to-date, accurate information even if the patient is unable to remember.
- ▶ Give patients more control over who has access to their medical information.



*“It would benefit everyone in an emergency situation. There are always risks and problems to work through getting information to the right people and only to those with [secure] access.”*

—CONSUMER RESEARCH  
EHI, JULY 2006

However, consumers identified what they view as a high priority for health information exchange: to preserve confidentiality and ensure privacy and security of the system and the information.

## The Patient-Provider Relationship

The relationship between the physician and patient is the foundation of the healthcare delivery system, and the fundamental principle at play is trust. Trust is a belief that whatever information is discussed or exchanged is kept confidential between the patient and the healthcare provider. Health information exchange initiatives must fit seamlessly into this existing “promise of trust.”