



## ELECTRONIC MEDICAL RECORDS

**Question:** It seems lately my doctor spends more time looking at the computer than at me during an office visit. What is she doing?

**Answer:** Welcome to the new medicine: a private conversation between you, your doctor and a computer! Health care regulations required that providers switch to electronic medical records starting in 2012. Most hospitals and large health systems, including skilled nursing facilities and outpatient clinics, are transitioning to electronic medical records. Eventually, all health records will be electronic.

There are many advantages to using electronic records. For example, doctors and pharmacists can see what medications you are currently taking or any allergies you have before starting something new. Electronic records cannot be deleted, lost or misplaced. Digital information can be sent across town or around the world in seconds, whereas paper medical charts have to be photocopied and mailed. In addition, electronic records will reduce administrative costs for copying, filing and shredding paper.

The disadvantage is that part of each health care visit is spent with the doctor, nurse or technician

entering information into the computer. He or she must document what was done and how you responded and enter all medications, lab reports or X-ray orders, and follow-up appointments during your visit. This means less face time with you while you are in the exam room. It is a learning curve that all patients will have to deal with while providers learn to juggle face time with screen time.

You can participate by telling your provider at the start of the visit that you understand the need for the computer but you would like to talk about what he or she is typing. You have a right to know what is going in your medical records. Ask about electronic access by email or a website where you can review visit information or lab results.

Many adults have started carrying their health records on a flash drive, so if they become sick or are hospitalized out of town, their health and treatment information is available electronically. So if you can't beat 'em, join 'em!

Sources: "Key Features of the Affordable Care Act by Year," <http://www.hhs.gov/healthcare/facts/timeline/timeline-text.html>.

## JOKE OF THE MONTH

**Did you hear about the restaurant on the moon?  
The food is terrific, but there's no atmosphere.**

—A *Prairie Home Companion* Pretty Good Joke Book

Laughter is known to boost the immune system, lower blood pressure, burn calories and release pleasure-inducing chemicals in the brain.

### Go Green!

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