

# Guide to Taking Control of Your Healthcare

Why Personal Health Records [Empower a Healthier America](#)

## Taking Control of Your Healthcare



  
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## Why Personal Health Records (PHRs) empower a healthier America

### Overview

Your medical record belongs to you. Yet few people ask for it or have ever seen one. While Americans rarely leave the supermarket, department store or bank without a receipt, we think little of leaving the doctor's office without a record of the visit. You have important health information such as blood type, immunizations, prescriptions, allergies, health conditions and emergency contacts in many places—at home, or in doctor or hospital records. But this information, when consolidated into one central, secure place becomes something much more valuable: a Personal Health Record, or PHR.

**Information is power.** A PHR enables control of your health information and gives you the power to make informed decisions. Track important medical data, prescriptions and care plans in a single place. Save money by preventing duplicate or unnecessary tests. Get the most out of every doctor visit.

### What is a Personal Health Record (PHR)?

A **Personal Health Record or PHR** is a web-based set of tools that enables access and coordination of an individual's lifetime health information. The individual controls his or her PHR, as well as how appropriate portions are made available to others who may need it.

According to industry experts, there are **seven attributes of an ideal PHR**:

1. Individual control - each person controls his or her PHR
2. The information represents one's entire lifetime
3. Information is from all of the individual's healthcare providers
4. The record is 100% accessible 24/7
5. Data is private and secure
6. Transparency - individuals know who entered data, where it was transferred from and who has viewed it
7. Interoperable - the PHR permits easy exchange of information across healthcare systems

### How is a PHR different than a traditional medical record or Electronic Medical Record?

A PHR is different because it is controlled by the individual and not limited to information from a particular provider or facility. Some health providers and offices use Electronic Medical Records (EMR) to keep records in digital form rather than traditional paper charts. EMR, also referred to as Electronic Health Records (EHR), is the future of recordkeeping in medical practices and facilities. As part of the Obama administration's Affordable Care Act, hospitals and physicians are required to adopt EMR by 2014 to bring down the cost of care and be eligible for incentives totaling \$19 billion. In addition, "interoperable" EMR will improve the efficiency of the healthcare system and patient care.

PHRs take EMR to another level, enabling consolidation of medical records from different specialists or hospitals, stored in one place, accessible anytime from any location. A true PHR is owned and controlled by the individual, making it portable regardless of healthcare providers, insurance carriers or employers. PHR aptly puts the "personal" in health records, providing an overall, comprehensive picture of health history and information.

## What is the value in having a PHR?

PHRs can save money, time and potentially even your life. In addition to personal value, PHRs are also a fundamental building block of consumer-driven healthcare. Studies estimate that with widespread PHR use, \$20 billion per year in inefficient healthcare spending can be saved.

Benefits of a PHR include:

- Lower your medical expenses by reducing the risk of errors, preventing unnecessary diagnostic tests or procedures, and proactively monitoring health status
- Access records anytime, from any location
- Consolidate medical records, storing them independently of your healthcare provider or physician's office
- Safeguard information regardless of job, insurance or geographic location
- Share your information with family members, caregivers, or doctors easily and efficiently
- Manage past and current medications, track health history and care plans
- Easily access and share films, x-rays and other test results
- Keep a record of family medical history and social influences
- Avoid unnecessary visits, procedures or tests and prevent medical errors
- Enable caregivers to manage health-related issues from near or far
- Proactively manage your medical future with one source for all your health information
- Be well prepared for travel, study abroad, unforeseen medical situations, natural disasters and emergencies

In addition, PHRs are known to improve the patient-physician relationship and empower more informed decision-making.

## How does PHR improve the quality of healthcare?

On a very broad level, PHR users save money, time and often, stress. Personal Health Records empower healthcare consumers and providers to be more informed; they in turn have more meaningful conversations with each other, often resulting in more accurate and efficient care. These savings translate to improved efficiency that could be realized at a systemic level as PHR use grows.

Studies support the “information is power” concept when it comes to the patient-physician relationship and the advantages of PHR. Key findings from *Markle Survey on Health in a Networked Life* (Jan. 2011) indicate:

- Many doctors and patients surveyed believe key information is lost in their health care conversations.

### WHAT IF?



#### **Hurricane Katrina**

*was responsible for tens of thousands of lost medical records. Over 1 million people were displaced. When these individuals relocated, the costs associated with re-establishing a medical history cost taxpayers hundreds of millions – an expense that could have been avoided with the integration of PHR.*

#### **What if?**

*Are you prepared in the event of a natural disaster? Can you easily retrieve your medical records in the aftermath of a hurricane, earthquake, fire or emergency?*

- A majority of the doctors surveyed indicate a preference for modern communications tools. Three in four doctors say they want to be able to share patient information with other professionals electronically.
- A clear majority of the public and doctors agree that patients ought to be able to download their personal health information online and share information electronically with doctors.
- Roughly 80 percent majorities of both the public and doctors agree it is important to require participating hospitals and doctors to share information to better coordinate care, cut unnecessary costs, and reduce medical errors.
- Majorities of both groups also agree on the importance of measuring progress and setting goals for improving the nation's health in chronic problems such as heart disease, asthma, diabetes, and obesity.
- The public and doctors overwhelmingly support privacy-protective practices, such as letting people see who has accessed their records, notifying people affected by information breaches, and giving people mechanisms to exercise choice and request corrections.

**Percentage of patients and doctors who say these priorities are important to ensure health IT subsidies are well spent:**



\*Source: Marikie Survey on Health in a Networked Life, Jan. 2011

## A Physician's Perspective on PHR

*"A consumer would be wise to use a PHR for many reasons:*

- **When they get sick**, the records are available. Even if they can't talk, the doctor can access their records. *If one of my patients ends up in the ER, I usually don't go to my office first to get their chart. I ask my patient to tell me what drugs they are taking, what they are allergic to, etc. If the records are stored online, I could have easy access to them on the internet.*
- If you **change doctors**, the records go with you more easily. Doctors are more likely to "nicely" give you records for a PHR while you are their paying patient than when you leave them and move to another physician.
- **No duplication of tests** and fewer unnecessary tests. This saves the patient money and time.
- Generally speaking, doctors are **more careful** if they believe the patient has a copy of everything they are doing.

*What it tells me when a patient has an online PHR is that he or she is savvier. And that would keep most doctors – myself included – on their toes a bit more."*

*--Dr. Howard Zahalsky, Internal Medicine, Arlington, VA;  
U.S. Medical Director, Activ Doctors Online*

## What are the steps to creating a Personal Health Record?

You can create a PHR in four simple steps:

1. **Assemble** personal and medical information you already have. This includes but is not limited to:
  - Personal information – name, birth date, social security number, birth certificate
  - Emergency contacts – next of kin and who to contact in case of emergency
  - Health provider information – names, address, phone numbers of physicians, dentist and specialists
  - Health insurance information – carrier, identification or policy number/s
  - Current medications and dosages
  - Immunizations with dates
  - Allergies
  - Recent physical examination
  - Important test results
  - Living wills, advance directives
  - Organ donor authorization
  - Dated list of significant illnesses and/or surgeries
  - Family history – events, dates, hereditary conditions of importance
  - Specialist opinions
  - Vision records
  - Dental records
  - Correspondence with provider/s
  - Authorization forms for release of information, surgeries and medical procedures
2. **Request and authorize** the release of records from the above list or any additional information you still need for a complete PHR.
3. **Select a Personal Health Record** option that meets your needs.

Look for a PHR provider that meets the ideal criteria covered earlier. Accessibility and security are typically the top concerns of consumers. Once the key attributes are met, additional features should also be considered, such as: calendars to track appointments and other information and health trackers that monitor conditions, medications, and/or important data such as blood pressure or cholesterol.
4. **Enter** the information or authorize a third party to do it on your behalf.

Some PHRs provide a way for you to enter your own information, through an online portal or forms. Others make it possible for your pharmacy or doctor's office to add information electronically. Or, if collecting medical records from doctors' offices or hospitals is too burdensome or time-consuming, look for a PHR with a data collection and management service that will do this on your behalf for a fee. Depending on factors like age and medical history, this service is often well worth the price.

With your new PHR, you can store your health information securely in one location. If it meets all seven industry standards for an ideal PHR, you control your account, and data is protected with the highest level of security and encryption, as well as HIPAA-compliant. You'll have instant 24/7 access to lifetime medical history, up-to-date records and care plans, from anywhere in the world. Your PHR will save you time, money and could even save your life.

To learn more about the first online PHR with Second Medical Opinion service, visit [www.activoctoronline.com](http://www.activoctoronline.com) or call 1.888.51.ACTIV.



# ACTIV DOCTORS ONLINE

[www.activdoctorsonline.com](http://www.activdoctorsonline.com)

Activ Doctors Online provides a secure, comprehensive and user-friendly portal for individuals and families to control their own health history. Memberships are controlled by the individual but can be purchased by individuals, organizations or corporations for their employees. ActivDoctorsOnline.com is an easy, secure, and organized way for anyone to consolidate their lifetime medical information, far beyond traditional physician-based EHR services. Activ Doctors Online membership also includes access to our completely unique online Second Medical Opinion service, for a valuable consultation in the event of an acute health crisis or diagnosis, from an unparalleled team of world-renowned experts within 48 hours. All Activ Doctors Online services are available worldwide, 24/7 via our online login system that is secure and HIPAA compliant.