PHR and How the VA Is Using It to Improve the Health of America's Veterans

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The Personal Health Record (PHR), or My HealtheVet as Veteran’s Affairs calls it, is an online personal health record system that allows veterans to access their personal health information, anywhere and anytime by use of a computer with an Internet connection. When a user registers to use the website they are able to record and store personal information such as: allergies, immunizations, and medical events that all help to build a personal health summary. In addition, family health history along with military health history can be added in order to provide a broader range of information that is available to the user. Aside from health history, personal goals can be set and tracked in the system, and journals can be utilized that help to log food and activity habits. VA benefits and services are also quickly accessible in this PHR hub, so it ends up being a one-stop shop for veterans who need access to all this pertinent information, all in one place.

Interaction and interfacing with the system can increase depending on the user’s status and interaction with utilizing VA services – additional functionality becomes available for users who are enrolled for care at VA facilities. Some of the increased functionality available to these users are features such being able to refill prescriptions and receiving personalized tips on how to stay healthy. It’s important to note that while this service is available via Veteran’s Affairs, and many would logically think only veterans can use the service, anyone can actually utilize some of the core tools on the website by creating a basic level account, which does not require authentication of identity. In addition, dependents and caregivers of veterans can also utilize the website, so also makes up a portion of users who are not strictly veterans. Since 2003, more than 740,000 users have registered for the website and 72 percent of these users are VA patients.

The features of the system have continued to grow since the inception of the system in 2003. Currently there are plans to allow veterans to schedule and change appointments, view lab results, as well as communicate with their health providers via secure messaging. This type of additional point of contact, as well as all the data in general that is available in the PHR, may end up being able to reduce the need for unscheduled visits to VA facilities; by deterring unnecessary traffic within the facilities, it allows these facilities to provide overall better and more prompt care to all of its patients. In addition to the records and tools mentioned earlier, additional resources (information about avoiding illness, facts about common conditions, etc.) have been added to the system that help promote and improve positive health in all of its users. Couple these resources with future plans to expand the functionality of the system and the VA has armed veterans with the power to control their own health information; this access and knowledge will vastly help improve the health of our nation’s veterans.

References

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