

Risks and Benefits of Electronic Health Records

Have you ever wondered how the pharmacist deciphers a hand-written prescription from your physician? If so, you're not alone! One of the many benefits of storing your medical records electronically is that your files will be easier to read. No longer will anyone have to decipher hand written notes, so errors can be avoided. As technology continues to play an increasingly important role in health care, the national movement towards electronic health record systems is leading to many improvements in the quality of patient care. Yet, as with paper record systems, there are risks.

The following table depicts some of the major benefits and risks involved in the creation, storage, maintenance, and exchange of electronic health records.

RISKS	BENEFITS
Unauthorized access to patient information	Privacy and security of data — access control by patient and providers
Inaccurate patient information if records are not updated in real-time	Greater patient access to medical history data
Unavailability of EHR system due to technical problems (downtime)	Increased quality of care — notes about your care are easier to read and reduce risk of errors
Potential malpractice liability (data loss or destruction, inappropriate corrections to the medical record, inaccurate data entry, errors related to problems that arise during the transition to EHRs)	Improved efficiency and time management of medical staff
Over reliance by staff on EHR system resulting in health care professionals spending less time with the patient	Efficient use of physical space — elimination of paper records and charts
Patient access to information about conditions that they may not understand which may frighten them.	Improved emergency backup and recovery of electronic systems

Sources:

Health Information Technology: Benefits of EHR and HIE, eHealthWV.org,
Risks, Barriers, and Benefits of EHR Systems: A Comparative Study Based on Size of Hospital by Minal Thakkar and Diane C. Davis, February/March 2005,
Electronic Health Records Raise New Risks of Malpractice Liability by Joel B. Korin and Madelyn S. Quattrone, June 19, 2007.