

Chapter I

Towards Patient–Centered Care: The Role of E–Health in Enabling Patient Access to Health Information

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides a conceptual foundation by exploring the existing literature on traditional health-care, patient-centered health care, and the progression of e-health in enabling the movement towards patient-centered care. This chapter also discusses enhancing the relationship between the patient and the healthcare provider through e-health. We conclude with a discussion of the future of patient-centered e-health and future research opportunities in this area.

INTRODUCTION

Access to information is important for enabling effective collaboration between patients and their healthcare providers. Use of information systems (IS) in patient-centered care renders an opportunity to provide individuals access to their own health information (Bailey, 1998) as well as other

resources. Today, technological advances have changed how patients and healthcare providers regard health information.

- The concept of individual access anytime, anyplace, and anywhere is taking shape with the help of online applications that promise greater participation of patients in their own

healthcare decisions (Wickramasinghe & Goldberg, 2005).

- Patients’ access to information can be of benefit or detriment to health outcomes (Carrigan, 1993), and it is important to optimize information delivery and guidance to promote benefits.
- Individuals from all social and economic backgrounds need to better manage their health, so it is important that an information divide is not created as an unintended consequence of e-health (Currie & Guah, 2006; Luce, Phillips, Benjamin, & Wasson, 2006; Wasson, 2006).

It is important to make the distinction between patient-centered e-health (PCEH) and traditional health IS before we continue our discussion. Traditional health IS were designed to meet the needs of healthcare providers and were used by health workers to assist them in patient care. Many healthcare providers are now developing e-health for use by patients to support searches for health information as well as other interactions with the provider. Key distinctions between traditional health IS and these new forms of PCEH are presented in Table 1. The authors’ vision is that patients’ ability to access to information through PCEH can be used to economically empower them to better manage their health.

This chapter provides a conceptual foundation by exploring the literatures relating to traditional healthcare, patient-centered healthcare, and the role e-health has played in enabling the movement towards patient-centered care. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the role, status, and future of PCEH and future research opportunities. The authors hope to stimulate awareness of the progress PCEH is making in providing individuals with the capability to create and manage their own health information.

BACKGROUND

Healthcare Delivery Systems and Health IS

For centuries, hospitals have been a primary means for healthcare delivery (Carrigan, 2003). Services including patient care and record keeping were rendered at the physical location of the hospital building. The healthcare provider’s access to patient information was also limited to the physical boundaries of the hospitals. These services were traditionally provided using paper and pen and other manual technologies such as photocopying and hand delivering documents to departments within the hospital (Koska, 1990) or to the patients. Responsibility for collecting and storing patient information was left to the

Table 1. Traditional health IS and PCEH

	Traditional Health IS	PCEH
Emphasis	Record-keeping	Access to patient information
Users	Provider personnel	Patient and provider
Interaction	Provider → Patient	Provider ← → Patient
Supports	Provider activities	Patient health management
Services available	At hospital location	Anywhere, anytime
System accessibility	Accessed locally	Accessed globally
Patient access	Patient has only indirect access to patient information	Patient has direct access to patient information

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