

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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UT Southwestern makes accessing health information as easy as lifting a finger

DALLAS – Sept. 20, 2005 – Viewing your health records, requesting prescription refills and checking the time of your next doctor's appointment is now a mouse-click away for patients in UT Southwestern Medical Center's primary-care clinics.

Three of UT Southwestern's clinics – general internal medicine, family and community medicine, and obstetrics and gynecology – will be among the first in North Texas to debut an online portal called MyChart, giving patients unprecedented access to their health records.

"This is driven by our desire to provide a more effective communication link with our patients," said Dr. John McConnell, executive vice president for health system affairs. "This gives another option to patients who want Web-based access to their health records."

Patients who choose to sign up for MyChart receive access to portions of their health records, including immunizations, allergies, medications and lab results. The portability of these records means they can check them wherever they have access to the Internet.

It's easy to use and easy to navigate. The link between a patient and their health information is now as fast as a keystroke.

"It was really easy moving around the screens," said Ben Weaver, a patient at UT Southwestern and user of MyChart. "There are also links to a lot of other (medical) information and that's good."

Anytime access means patients don't have to wait for information until the clinic opens, said Dr. McConnell.

"This is another avenue for patients and doctors to work together as partners in their treatment," said Dr. DuWayne Willett, associate professor of internal medicine and Mr. Weaver's physician. "Patients can easily validate their health information, and this will have a positive impact on their health care."

Lab results and other information are filtered through the physician and then provided to the patient via MyChart as a way to help a patient interpret and understand medical information. One highly anticipated addition to the portal includes prescription refills.

"MyChart helps each patient become a more active member of his or her own health-care team. Patients will have easy access to personal health records and advice related to specific needs, and a simpler method to communicate with health-care providers," said Dr. Shelley Roaten, chairman of family and community medicine and holder of the Perry E. Gross, M.D., Distinguished Chair in Family Medicine. "This is a leading-edge tool, especially for maintenance of health and for better management of

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chronic conditions.”

Dr. Roaten’s patients were among the first to use an Internet-based patient access program last year that is similar to the MyChart system.

Access to MyChart is strictly voluntary. Patients who want to participate are given an initial access code that allows them to set up their own login identification and password from the privacy of a home computer. If they choose, they can also visit the campus library, and research librarians will walk them through the initial steps on a computer in a private room.

The MyChart portal is a component of a broader, multimillion dollar Clinical Services Initiative, which, among other objectives, is designed to convert paper medical records and other systems to digital formats.

In the wake of disasters such as Hurricane Katrina, the portability of electronic health records may make it easier to retrieve vital medical information if patients are relocated to other areas of the country.

“Clinical Information Services has been installing the electronic medical records in UT Southwestern clinics for more than a year,” said Kirk Kirksey, vice president for information resources. “The university’s MyChart represents our commitment to world-class service. Providing Internet access to the digital medical record will empower our patients and their families by delivering clinical information whenever and wherever it is needed.”

A powerful encryption system gives patients the best in Web-based security when viewing their records.

UT Southwestern strictly adheres to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act guidelines for the protection of patients’ confidential information. The campus HIPAA privacy specialist and information security specialist have developed extensive training programs for all employees and have completed a comprehensive process for the protection of patient information.

MyChart will be implemented in all subspecialty clinics within the next two years. Personalized, diagnosis-based links within the patient’s Web site can direct them to other Internet resources related to their medical conditions and medications as well.

E-mail alerts will also let patients know if they need to log onto MyChart to check on any new information, including appointment times or lab results.

“We have a strong institutional commitment to electronic medical records,” Dr. McConnell said. “This is another piece to our overall investment.”

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