

2. No Ifs, Ands, or Buts: Why You Need A Savvy Patient Health Record

Often when I tell people about this book, they share their frustrations with their health care and tell me stories of medical errors they, their family, or their friends have experienced. Common to these discussions has been their frustration at not knowing what they could have done to prevent the error or better handle the situation. They live in fear another error will occur. Their trust in the medical system is low. I certainly relate to all of these concerns. I deal with the same issues to varying degrees at different times. The good news is that my fears have greatly diminished since writing this book and with the use of my *Savvy Patient HEALTH RECORD*.

Before I discuss detailed goals, understand that your *Savvy Patient HEALTH RECORD* is *for you*. You are gathering your medical information, recording it, and using it for your benefit to help you communicate more effectively as you work in partnership with your health care providers. You may choose to show or give them copies of a particular form at various times, but the focus of the *Savvy Patient HEALTH RECORD* is to:

- Challenge you with a new way to think about and manage your or a loved one's health care needs.
- Help you become an empowered and involved patient or caregiver who is knowledgeable and actively partnering with your health care providers.
- Empower you to lead your own health care team.
- Improve your chances for timelier and better diagnoses and decision-making.
- Decrease your chances for medical errors.
- Enable you to do your part to cut health care costs.

Web sites are currently available that enable you to input pieces of your information and, if providers desire, they can access the input from your site with your permission. Electronic Medical Record Systems (EMRS) are under development all over the country. A few locations have already implemented them. The goal of EMRS is to improve the way providers capture and share patient information. All the members of a patient's health care team, including hospital and test facilities, will have the ability to input and view a patient's complete record, with the patient's permission. According to industry experts, however, it will be many years before these systems become widely used and replace current paper files. Some of these systems will allow you to access the information, some will allow you to add information to your record, others won't. To my knowledge, none of them capture information with as much detail as the *Savvy Patient HEALTH RECORD*. If you choose to use an EMRS, you will be able to request printouts of your information, incorporate them into your *Savvy Patient HEALTH RECORD*, and have a complete set for your use.

Advances in technology are great and are moving our health care system in the right direction. Systems for capturing information accurately and making it accessible are desperately needed. They will prevent some errors and close information gaps, but not all of them. *These information systems will never know all that you know about yourself, nor will they be able to connect all of the pieces of your health story the way you can. They will not have all of the details of every appointment.*

One of the unintended consequences of EMR Systems is that people may think that their providers will have ALL of their medical records, so they will not have to keep track themselves. In fact, technology may make you, as a patient, more inclined to hand even more control over to your providers and hospitals - another unintended consequence. Providers will definitely have more and better information in front of them with fewer missing test results and reports from other providers. But, you will still need to be in charge of your care, know what is in the records and how to use the information to attain the best care possible and prevent medical errors.

Your *Savvy Patient* HEALTH RECORD is more than an information-gathering tool, as you will see by the goals listed below. Through use of the your *Savvy Patient* HEALTH RECORD you will:

- Have a mechanism to easily capture past, present, and on-going health-related information for *fingertip* access in any circumstance.
- Become more knowledgeable about your body and your health.
- Be involved: Prepare better and participate more fully (partner) with your provider(s) in the recording and detective work required to diagnose and treat your condition(s), e.g. decrease the chances you will relinquish total control to your provider(s).
- Have discussions with your providers that are more effective and efficient in time use with emphasis on providing complete and honest information and better answers to your providers' questions.
- Better understand symptom-recognition complexities; learn how to recognize and communicate symptoms more effectively.
- Be able to ask better questions. Questions that help your provider think and possibly consider alternatives.
- Minimize the time it takes you to fill out providers' forms without forgetting vital information.
- Be able to give providers complete and accurate information – tell a story that helps your provider help you.
- Recognize the importance of obtaining copies of all test results and how to use the information.
- Increase the likelihood that you will get appropriate tests and decrease the number of tests and / or office visits because, both you and your provider have more and better information.
- Save money - reduce health care costs by reducing duplications, number of appointments, and averting costly medical errors.
- Manage hospitalization more effectively and avert certain types of preventable hospital errors.

- Recognize the importance of having or being a patient advocate and how to do so.
- Better understand medication dangers and how to better manage medication at home and in the hospital.
- More effectively research your conditions and options for treatment.
- Make connections between research findings, family history, medical conditions, symptoms, and medication effects.
- Use research findings, and the guidance and coaching of your provider, to make better decisions regarding your treatment options.
- Be the leader and coordinator of your health care team and keep the members informed and connected.

A long list, but it leads to better care, better outcomes, and fewer potential medical errors. Graphically, it looks like this:

Ongoing Use of your *Savvy Patient* HEALTH RECORD —▶ Empowerment, Knowledge & Control
 —▶ Better Care and Outcomes —▶ Fewer Crises & Medical Errors —▶ More Confidence &
 Peace of Mind

You Make The Difference

- By using your *Savvy Patient* HEALTH RECORD, there will be less stress on you and your providers, fewer medical errors, and lower medical costs. Over time, as the number of empowered patients and caregivers grow, the potential exists for fewer lawsuits, and lower overall costs in the medical system.
- Be good stewards of all of your health care resources. The guidelines in this book and forms in the *Savvy Patient's TOOLKIT* are designed to help you be a better steward of your health and your health care dollars. Those of us fortunate enough to have health insurance don't pay our bills beyond deductibles and co-pays. It hasn't bothered us much when we've seen waste in the medical system such as duplication of tests. We sometimes don't even see the bills from a hospital stay and don't know how accurate they are. If there are overcharges, the hospital gets paid. This lack of stewardship on our part has contributed to the health care crisis we are facing today.

Coming Next

As I am not a doctor or nurse, some ask what qualifies me to write this book and speak on this subject? I have had many say I have the perfect set of qualifications to do so. The next chapter tells you about me and hopefully you will agree that I do have the perfect background and qualifications for this mission. I do consider it a mission. I could be retired and doing hobbies, but I have a passion for helping others achieve the best health care possible.