

## Electronic health records now available to patients

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**BANDON** — Bandon residents can now find up to date personal medical records through Electronic Health Record patient portals.

Portal access offered by hospitals and medical clinics provides a secure online environment for patients to review their health records, request appointments, even send messages to their medical provider.

Once patients' questions about information security are answered, it's a tool many are eager to use, according to Amanda Taylor, marketing director for North Bend Medical Center.

"The people I talk to find it helpful and easy to use," said Taylor.

Electronic charts are quickly accessible to medical professionals within the same facility and speed communication when a patient receives services in multiple medical offices.

Making the switch from paper to electronic recording has great potential to make work flow and patient care more efficient, said Megan Sweet, clinical operations manager for Coast Community Health Center.

"The system has tools to coordinate care with other providers. Since we're in such a rural area, it will help us with referrals for patients who need to see specialists," she said.

Mandy Calvert is director of information systems for Southern Coos Hospital & Health Center. She says the portability of electronic records can also improve patients' safety when they're away from home. Access to information such as allergies to medications can be a few clicks away.

"It is a great tool if you're traveling and need to seek medical care," she said.

Just because physicians are maintaining electronic records does not mean patient history is automatically shared. Since electronic records are subject to the same HIPAA regulations as paper charts, patients must authorize sharing of information between medical providers.

"As a patient, you have the right to disclose, or not disclose, your information," said Calvert.

And, by law, some information will never be accessible from your patient portal, noted Taylor.

To protect patient information, health records are encrypted and stored via secure, independent web servers.

Patients will need to provide an email address to register. Proof of identification, with a photo ID, is required to complete the registration process. Most health facilities provide the online service free for registered patients.

There's good reason for local health care providers to adopt EHR technology this year.

Medicare and Medicaid provide financial incentives to organizations who demonstrate successful EHR implementation ahead of the federal compliance deadline. The incentive deadline for hospitals and primary care clinics to complete the first stage of implementation is Dec. 31.

Incentive dollars are offered in stages, with benchmarks outlined for meaningful use. Patient centered objectives include improvement in health care quality, safety and efficiency; care coordination and overall public health. EHR tools should also engage patients in their own health care while ensuring privacy and security of patient information.

Southern Coos Hospital & Health Center is on track to meet compliance and earn incentive dollars, according to CEO Charles Johnston. The financial kick-back is a welcome partial return on the investment of resources required to learn and implement the new systems. The hospital started EHR implementation early, and is already entering the stage two meaningful use reporting period.

"Mandy and her people are doing an excellent job," he said.

Hours of training in EHR feel like an intrusion on patient time, but the end goal is good, said Johnston.

## **More information**

Patients can visit their provider's website, or contact their clinic or hospital for details about patient portal registration. Learn more about Electronic Health Records at [HealthIT.gov](http://HealthIT.gov).