

## Challenges in EHR Adoption – Data Protection

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The eHealth industry is without doubt, at an exciting stage of development with the drive for Electronic Health Record (EHR) adoption being the 'flavor of the day'. Motivated by potential returns that includes reducing cost and medical errors while improving quality of patient care, countries like USA, Canada, UK, Singapore and Australia have adopted and implemented (or are in the midst of implementing) EHR initiatives.

Commonly defined as a longitudinal electronic record of patient health information generated by one or more encounters in any care delivery setting, the EHR promise capabilities that enables semantic sharing of clinical information across different health care settings through a network-connected enterprise-wide environment and indeed, the adoption of a national wide EHR does hold huge potential for collaboration between healthcare professionals across the healthcare continuum in the provision of patient-centric care since the increased access to medical data serves as a key enabler to provision of personal and holistic care.

The adoption of EHR initiatives however brings forth a number of privacy and data protection issues. In comparison to the 'way of paper', data that are deemed to be sensitive and confidential are being made accessible to a wider range of end-users with both ease and speed, escalating scales of concerns pertaining to confidentiality and more importantly, the consensus process in releasing or obtaining the medical record.

While the implementation has primarily been clinically centric and technological focus, deliberation pertaining to confidentiality has not exactly been of top priority in the agenda, rather, the emphasis are almost always placed on actual ground adoption. The technical aspects of EHR strives for the uneventful, secure and speedy transmission of medical data between healthcare professionals but once the data has been delivered, the risk of 'information leak' is no longer one pertaining to technology but rather, of polices and governance

The real challenge to relevant decision makers lies in having to maintain the delicate balance between patients right to privacy while ensuring timely and unrestricted access of medical information for healthcare providers so information obtain can be translated into meaningful use.

Data protection challenges brought forth by implementations of EHR is further complicated by the differences or simply lack of privacy data protection guidelines in the country of interest. While none of these serves as a major show stopper, there will come a time when these issues need to be addressed. The real question to be addressed is - where and how do we draw the line of delicate balance between clinical needs and data protection regulations?

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