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Health Data Card Makes Medical History Mobile

By Phil Rooney
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Going to the doctor is not usually most people's idea of a good time, but it can get even worse when you're going through a period of extended treatment and have to keep filling out the same forms and providing the same information time after time.

Henry Zach, president of Health Data Card, said that experience by a doctor who is a silent partner in his new "smart card" venture, thought the same thing. That's where the idea of the Health Data Card has its roots.

Dr. Dan Dietrich had the idea of putting a patient's health history and medical information on a chip on a credit-card sized piece of plastic, saving time and making sure nothing is omitted.

That was a problem, Zach said. Considering a person could have allergies and be on multiple medications, it's a potentially dangerous problem.

"You're not doing it when you feel good, most of the time," Zach said. "The doctor can only give care based on the information he has."

While there have been other medical cards, this is the first one that's "patient focused," Zach said.

The importance becomes magnified as people continue to see multiple physicians in the course of getting their care. People are more mobile, in terms of travel and seeing specialists for various parts of their care.

"Each provider has only a piece of the puzzle," Zach said.

That's especially true in his family, Zach said, where 12 doctors treat him, his wife and their three children.

"There has to be a way for a patient to deliver that information," Zach said. "It's become more important for an individual to have that information in one place."

Enter Health Data Card.



Henry Zach displays his new Health Data Card in a PDA.

Providers and employers are starting to provide the card, offered by HDC, which puts the information on the cards. Zach's company is also providing free software to licensed health care providers, who not only can read the card, but can also write new information onto the chip so the information remains current.

"The card is dynamic," he said.

The card also provides high security, so if you lose your HDC, no unauthorized person can learn your medical history.

"The card can only be read through the software we provide," Zach said.

No financial information is stored on the card, which must be verified through Social Security numbers, date of birth and other key information.

Insurance information can be stored on the card, again saving more time and questions.

The HDC has five key areas of

information, all determined by marketing studies.

- An emergency section with information needed by emergency personnel.

- Demographic and insurance information.

- Details on the medication a person may be taking.

- A list of allergies.

- Information on a person's current immunization status.

Other information that can be included are advance directives (living wills), family history, information on a person's normal vital signs, an OB section, habits (smoker, nonsmoker, drinker) and other things that may help make a diagnosis.

While the HDC doesn't provide a full medical history, it does provide enough information for a treating physician to involve a person's regular doctors.

It's the type of information that can be vital in a place like Omaha, where many people may see doctors in the Alegent or Methodist systems, but the trauma centers for emergency medical care in the event of an accident are at Creighton and the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

All Omaha hospitals have the software needed to read the card, Zach said.

To help with the situation, Health Data Card, in cooperation with First National Bank, has provided 20 PDAs that can read the card to the Omaha Fire Department so paramedics can have immediate access to the potentially vital information. Five more PDAs were purchased for distribution to other area fire departments.

Health care systems are now providing the cards to patients and so are employers, Zach said. The decision on whether or not to charge for the card remains with the entity providing the card.

The graphics can be customized. HDC provides the card, which can have multiple uses, Zach said. Employers are helping by providing information on doctors and health care networks.

"Right now we're just moving into the marketing phase of it," he said.

U Save Pharmacies joined the program in the last 30 days, Zach said, the first pharmacy to do so.

In the future, the information on the card will decrease, but the card will

identify the person and provide access to the information from multiple sources, Zach said. HDC is providing interface software to allow existing systems to communicate with each other.

About 3,500 cards were distributed in the early going, with Hope Medical providing cards to the people it serves through its outreach clinic and pharmacy. The number grew September 8 when Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Nebraska announced it will provide the cards to its employees.

Dr. Thomas J. Dobleman, a head and neck cancer reconstructive surgeon in Omaha, also has provided the cards to his patients.

Cards for Seniors

As of September 16, senior citizens can also take advantage of the new cards. Up to 3,000 Omaha area residents will be able to receive Health Data Cards for a nominal \$14 fee through a grant from an anonymous corporate donor, Zach said.

"HDC normally markets the cards to employers, insurance providers, healthcare systems, physicians, associations and other organizations for distribution to employees, patients and members, but this excludes residents who are 65 years of age and older and may not be employed or a member of any group. The grant will fund a majority of the cost of the cards including handling and postage fees," he said.

Individuals 65 or older can apply for a card by completing the on-line application form at www.healthdatacard.com and mailing their \$14 payment plus tax by check to HDC. Printed applications are also available by calling 402-933-5000.

"Depending on the response, we plan to mail out cards as part of this program within two to three weeks of receipt of the applications," Zach said. In addition to the cards, participants will receive decals for automobiles and homes so emergency personnel will be alerted to look for the card. They will also receive a printout of the information on the card so they can verify their information.

Physicians who want to install the software and readers so they can read the information on the cards should contact HDC at 402-453-7000. The software is free, easy to install and simple to learn, according to Zach. "Training takes only 20 minutes. We install the software, which does not interfere with any existing office programs," he added. "In fact, our software can even integrate seamlessly with most practice software if they would like." Only licensed medical facilities or providers can receive the free software that reads the cards.

Zach said Omaha, because the HDC is based here and because of the complexity of the multiple health systems, is serving as a model he hopes to take around the country.

He's just getting started.