

## Web site to hold medical records

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Beginning today, students at the University of Nebraska Medical Center can sign up and begin storing their own health information through a Web-based program.

In a trial program with the Omaha-based company HDC 4Point Dynamics, students will receive free access to a secure Web site.

Using the site, they can begin filling in emergency contact and insurance information as well as details about medications, allergies and family history.

The students will own the personal health records, said Dr. Steven Hinrichs, professor and director of the University of Nebraska Center for Biosecurity. They can access them wherever they go and give their doctors permission to view them. Such access could prove invaluable if they're injured away from home or if their careers take them far afield.

In addition, he said, students will begin gaining experience with electronic health records that they can pass on to fellow health care providers.

"If we don't start teaching our next generation of doctors and scientists now, this isn't going to happen," Hinrichs said. "This is so important to the future of cost control; we have to start now."

The trial program also will help to determine how this kind of a system might work with larger patient groups in the future.

Electronic health records that could move with patients have been touted as a promising tool to improve the quality and efficiency of health care and a way to save money because they could prevent drug errors and reduce duplication of tests, among other things.

Today, most patients' records are scattered among the hospitals, doctor's offices and clinics where they've received care. While many of those institutions are building their own electronic records, the records can't "talk" to each other.

Creating personal health records outside such systems is seen as a way to bridge that gap - and give patients more control over their health information. Recently, a group of large national employers - including Wal-Mart Stores Inc., Intel Corp. and British Petroleum - announced plans to provide digital health records to their employees later this year.

The personal health record developed by HDC is similar in concept, said Henry Zach, the company's president.

He and Hinrichs said they believe the new program would mark the first time an academic institution has offered a Web-based personal health information program to its students.

"Its really about personal health responsibility," Zach said.

Students were to be sent e-mails Thursday night providing details about how to access the password-protected site using the Internet and any browser.

The personal health record contains nine categories, from demographics and insurance information to hospital and clinic visit information. Even information about advanced directives and living wills can be added.

Students can give doctors and others access to the information by providing them with their user identification and a guest password. Users can later revoke that access. The records have a log that allows patients to see who has accessed their records.

Hinrichs said program partners don't yet know how the system will be received by its roughly 3,000 students. But they have gotten positive feedback from student leaders.

The information itself will not be accessible by the university, Zach said. It's kept by HDC on servers in a secure data center. The system has been audited for security by outside firms.

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