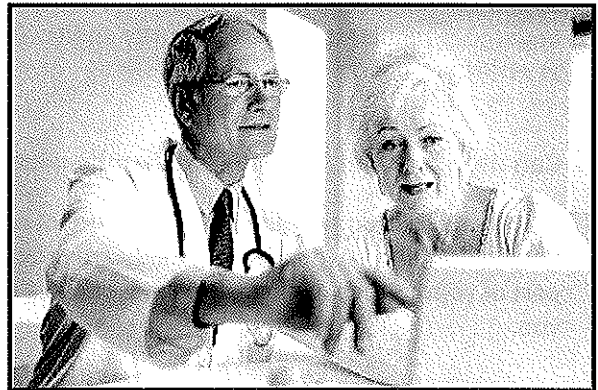


A Patient's Guide to Understanding Health Information Exchange

What is Health Information Exchange, and why is it important?

Health Information Exchange, or HIE, has been happening for years...on paper and over fax machines. As new technology came along, it became obvious how important it was to switch from paper and fax machines to faster, better ways of exchanging information in order to provide the best health care possible.

Electronic HIE is a way of sharing health information more efficiently among participating doctors' offices, hospitals, labs, radiology centers, and other health organizations that are treating and serving patients. Electronic exchange allows delivery of the right information to the right place at the right time, enabling safer, more efficient patient care.



What is eHIN?

The East Tennessee Health Information Network, or eHIN, is a local, independent nonprofit organization responsible for developing and maintaining the electronic exchange infrastructure of health information in middle East Tennessee. eHIN allows authorized doctors and other healthcare professionals treating you in a hospital or doctor's office to access your medical information. For example, your primary care doctor could review lab results from tests conducted during a recent hospital stay, or a radiology report from a specialist, before you arrive for your next office visit so that he can provide you with better care.

What are the benefits of having a Health Information Exchange?

Currently, when doctors need to share health information about a common patient they are both treating, the process is difficult and usually involves phone calls and faxes. Gathering health information on their patient may take hours or even days. Treatment errors may be made due to lack of key information. When doctors are able to access patient history through a health information exchange, or HIE, it can help give them better insight into current problems the patient is having. When a patient is under the care of multiple physicians, the HIE may help avoid duplicate tests and procedures. Maybe most important of all, through the HIE, the doctors treating you will have better access to more information that may even help to save your life in an emergency.

What information is in the HIE?

Participating health care providers may be able to view certain lab reports and medical reports from your doctor visits, hospital discharge summaries, radiology reports, and in some cases, images.

eHIN participants are required by policy to attempt to refrain, to the best of their ability, from submitting sensitive lab or medical reports and sensitive information (e.g., individually identifiable information from federally funded substance abuse programs that treat, diagnose, and refer patients for substance abuse treatment).

How is my medical information kept private?

Protecting patient information is a top priority at etHIN. etHIN uses best-of-breed security measures to protect health information against risks such as unauthorized access, loss or destruction, inappropriate use, unauthorized modification, and unauthorized disclosure. Unlike a paper chart, every time your medical information is accessed through etHIN, the access is automatically logged and audited. etHIN follows applicable State and Federal laws, including HIPAA, to protect patient information. The etHIN system also undergoes regular third-party security audits. Protecting personal health information is critically important at etHIN.

Can my employer, neighbor, or family member contact etHIN and get my health information?

etHIN's policies do not allow the disclosure of or access to medical information by the general public or any person or persons who are not healthcare providers. Any healthcare provider attempting to access any part of your available information must have a direct treatment, payment, or operations relationship with you.

As a Blount Memorial patient, can I choose not to participate in the HIE?

As part of receiving care in East Tennessee, your health information may be available through the HIE to your doctors for treatment, operational, and payment purposes. However, if you prefer not to participate, you may tell each of your healthcare providers that you do not want them to share your medical information. It will then be your provider's responsibility, within the rules of their own policies, not to send your information to etHIN.

etHIN and healthcare providers in East Tennessee recommend that everyone participate in the HIE, because it's the best way to provide the most up-to-date medical information to your physicians. Having up-to-date information allows them to make the best diagnosis possible and provide the best treatment to you.

You will have the same opportunity to receive health care as everyone else does, even if you decide you don't want your medical information shared. However, it's important for you to understand that if you choose not to share your medical information, critical details might not be available to the doctors and nurses treating you during an emergency. Please consider this carefully before deciding not to share your information.

If I don't participate in the health information exchange now, can I change my mind later?

Yes. If you decide that you want to share your information later on, just contact each of your healthcare providers again, and let them know that you want your medical information shared.

For more information about etHIN and the benefits of electronic health information exchange, visit www.ethin.org.



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