

Policy Brief

Children's Health Care: Health Information Technology and Electronic Health Records

The Children's Health Fund (CHF) has long recognized the connection between high quality comprehensive health care and readily available and usable health information. Over 20 years ago CHF pioneered electronic health record (EHR) systems to address the vital need to maintain accurate health care records in a mobile health care delivery setting.

Effectively leveraging the use of health information technology (HIT) is critical to improving health care quality, improving practice efficiency, supporting an enhanced medical home, and responding to health care emergencies, including disaster-related events. By establishing the framework for widespread use of HIT and EHRs in pediatric settings, CHF believes that an EHR's content must be comprehensive, of high standards-based quality, and easy to use.

The CHF Experience

The New York Children's Health Project (NYCHP), CHF's flagship program, was established in direct response to a dramatic increase in the number of medically underserved homeless children in New York City. Homeless shelters are too often an interim stop for families as they struggle to find a new, stable place to live. In addition to searching for a residence, homeless families are often overwhelmed by circumstances and are unable to focus on healthcare as a priority. CHF believes that stabilizing families' health is crucial to their future stability in their new homes and communities. The availability, quality, and organization of medical records can often be neglected as homeless families move, or change providers, and existing health documents are misplaced or lost. CHF responded to this problem with its first generation EHR in 1989.

Although CHF moved forward in developing more sophisticated systems, the first version revolutionized health care delivery for many homeless families. Utilizing EHRs addresses the practical needs of limited space on a mobile medical unit as well as the clinical needs of providing continuous health care to a mobile and vulnerable population. The quality, efficiency, and sophistication of CHF's HIT has continued to improve through three generations of new and improved versions. This EHR is currently used by CHF's national network of programs and others seeking to upgrade their capacity in this area.

In 2009, CHF's NY Children's Health Project (NYCHP) received the very first Healthcare Information and Management System Society (HIMSS) Davies Community Health Organization Award. The award recognizes excellence in the implementation and value from health information technology achieved by the NYCHP staff and the role CHF's HIT initiatives played in this.

Comprehensive and Universal Pediatric EHR Content

CHF has designed, and built EHRs, and trained care givers to use ever more sophisticated and supportive HIT.

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Children's Health Fund

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Children's Health Care: HIT and EHR

Over time it has become increasingly clear that the pace of technology development has been far more rapid than the comprehensive data collection content set required to make the best use of these systems.

EHR content is the portion of the record that allows a physician, nurse, or other provider to enter and record the information important to a child's care. EHR content allows for the entry of vital information in a way that is meaningful to the provider and helps to ensure the child's welfare.

Well designed EHR content also makes it easier for clinics and other providers to meet complex government and health care reporting mandates.

To meet this critical need for high quality pediatric content, CHF pioneered the creation of the first comprehensive pediatric EHR content set in 2007. The content is based on best practices in health care, professional standards, and evidence-based medicine. CHF brought together pediatricians and other practitioners, including nutritionists and mental health professionals, from across its national network of programs to identify health information of vital importance to pediatric providers of care.

As a result of this collaboration, the pediatric EHR content set provides a full and complete picture of a child's health from birth through adolescence and adulthood. It has been organized and formatted for ready use in virtually any EHR. By emphasizing standards of quality and depth of practice, this EHR content set can be used universally for all children, while embracing the needs of medically underserved, special-needs, at-risk, and marginalized children.

In 2008, The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene began integrating this content set into its Primary Care Information Project (PCIP) system. This system is used by more than 500 providers in New York City, as well as other clinical practices in the United States.

Recommendations

CHF believes that in order to ensure coordinated and continuous care for children, a high quality comprehensive data collection system must be integrated into pediatric patient care. EHRs are one significant tool with which to achieve this goal. Therefore, as the nation moves forward with EHR adoption, efforts must be made to:

- Ensure EHRs are designed to enable the collection of the best possible quality and depth of information, and that they are appropriate for use throughout all stages of childhood.
- Establish standards and best practices to ensure that the integrity, security, and privacy of information are thoughtfully crafted and implemented.
- Ensure EHR content meets technical standards for health information exchange and that the quality and consistency of the data that is exchanged ensures a rich contribution to public health activities.
- Ensure health information collected in childhood is not utilized to negatively impact obtaining insurance coverage as an adult.

To achieve these ends, CHF supports legislative and regulatory efforts to:

- Ensure providers of health care to medically underserved populations have access to EHR technology.
- Provide vital resources, training, and support to enable pediatric providers to integrate HIT into their health care delivery systems.
- Invest at governmental and professional organization levels to establish EHR content that serves pediatric health care stakeholders and reflects an enhanced medical home model.
- Establish EHR privacy and security standards that addresses the ethical challenges that arise when long-lived health care documentation and records conflict with health care, insurance, and employment as children enter adulthood and the workforce.