



Readers of *Canadian Health* have a strong interest in improving and maintaining their health — especially those of you managing chronic conditions such as diabetes or high blood pressure. Many of you watch what you eat and drink, exercise regularly and use the Internet to find useful health information. When it comes to our health, most of us want to work with our physicians and not just be passive recipients of their advice.



We physicians wholeheartedly support this trend. Well-informed and motivated patients who take charge of their own health can make our work as doctors much easier and far more productive. At the Canadian Medical Association (CMA), we believe in a new model of health care that puts patients — not doctors or hospitals — at the centre of the healthcare system. Rather than focusing on who pays for what or how to make the system better for those who provide health care, everything needs to be seen through the lens of what is best for the patient.

We are fortunate that today's advances in technology strengthen our patients' ability to stay healthy and cement the bond between doctor and patient. Developments such as electronic medical records and trusted online sources of health information are being complemented by even more ways for physicians and patients to communicate and manage health problems. With more hospitals and physicians using electronic records, delivering patient care becomes easier and more efficient. The bad news? Right now, only 10% of Canadian doctors use electronic medical records exclusively. The good? We expect this number to grow dramatically very soon.

Patients, too, are ready for change. A recent U.S. survey found that 60% of respondents want online access to their doctors, medical records and test results. More and more attention is being given to electronic personal health records (PHRs), which let patients maintain and update a version of their own health

records. Technology giants such as Microsoft and Google are turning their attention this way.

In March, I was pleased to unveil the first made-in-Canada PHR, which lets patients communicate securely online with their doctors. It operates through Mydoctor.ca, a portal created by Practice Solutions, a CMA company.

By bringing the same ease of use as online banking to health care, Mydoctor.ca lets physicians register patients to use online tools such as asthma, blood pressure and weight trackers. Designed and tested by physicians and patients, the Mydoctor.ca portal also provides secure online messaging through a private channel. Once registered with their physicians, patients log on to the secure portal and enter their health information — such as daily asthma or blood pressure readings — for their physicians to access and monitor. Patients are given the power to safely and conveniently manage their own chronic conditions by streaming their health data directly and securely to their physicians.

There are challenges in ensuring that PHRs are secure, accurate and useful for both physicians and patients. While the challenges mirror many of the same problems associated with paper records, the potential benefits are much greater. The introduction of PHRs is one more sign that medicine is evolving to meet the needs of 21st-century patients with a virtual house call that takes patient-physician communication to the next level.

Strengthening the relationship between physician and patient is key to any system for improving health care. We strongly believe that advances such as electronic medical records and online patient portals can enhance this relationship and, in doing so, improve the health of all Canadians.

*Dr. Brian Day
President
Canadian Medical Association*