

Health in Hand

Dedicated to improving the health of Medicare consumers

Has Your Doctor's Office Gone Electronic?

Your health is your most valuable asset. And while you and your doctor should be partners in your care, it may not be easy if you have more than one doctor. That's because each doctor – such as your family practitioner, OB-GYN, or specialist – probably keeps his or her own medical record of your health information. With different information in each record, your complete health information is not in one place, in a consistent format.

According to Dr. Donald Wilson of Quality Insights of Pennsylvania, numerous efforts are underway to improve accuracy and access to medical information through technology.

"We are seeing a national push for widespread adoption of electronic health records," Wilson said.

While an electronic health record, or EHR, is basically a computerized version of your paper chart, Wilson said the benefits of conversion from paper to computer are immense.

"An EHR can instantly provide physicians with up-to-date, accurate information about their patients. That saves time and money, but most importantly it improves the safety and effectiveness of care."

Through the Doctors Office Quality-Information Technology Project, or DOQ-IT for short, Wilson and his team are helping Pennsylvania physicians research, install and learn to use electronic health records.

According to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), which is sponsoring the DOQ-IT Project, the



many benefits of electronic health records include:

- **Cutting down waiting time by shortening the time it takes to check in for appointments.** In some cases, patients can check in from home before they leave for the doctor's office. Some electronic health records allow doctors to order lab work electronically.
- **Reducing medical errors.** Since all the text in the records is typed, there is no guessing when it comes to reading handwriting. When the records are shared between doctors, it helps to prevent prescription interactions and overmedicating. When physicians send prescriptions to your pharmacist electronically – called e-prescribing – it makes writing, filling and receiving prescriptions quicker and easier, and it also makes it easier to automatically check for drug interactions and allergies.
- **Allowing patients to view lab results quickly and easily over secure Web sites on the Internet.** In some cases, X-rays and other tests can be stored within your electronic file as well. Also, reducing the amount of paper used in your doctor's office helps the environment.

Electronic health records and e-prescribing can help you and your doctor be partners in your health care. Ask your doctor today if the office uses electronic health records. ↪

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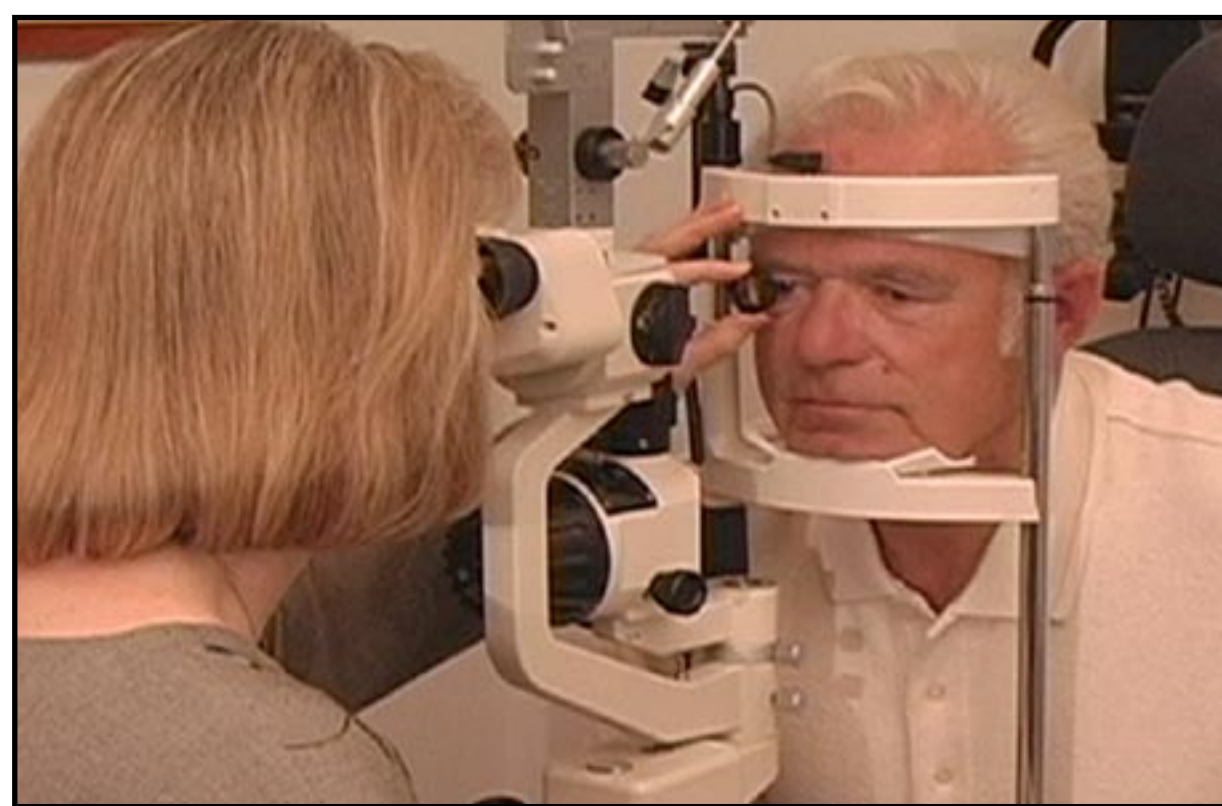
How to Maintain Healthy Eyes for Life

About 75 percent of ophthalmologist Ray DeMaio's patients are seniors – and in his years of practice at Bouquet, Mulligan, DeMaio Eye Professionals he's seen first hand the importance of good eye care.

Dr. DeMaio sees a lot of cataract and glaucoma patients, performs routine diabetic exams, and provides general eye care as well.

He stresses that eye care is particularly important for seniors who have certain medical conditions. Medicare covers eye exams for enrollees who have conditions such as diabetes, glaucoma, cataracts, and macular degeneration (see *Know Your Eyes* on page 2). During eye exams, the eyes are checked for cataracts, eye pressure is checked and vision is evaluated.

It's especially important for diabetics to have regular eye exams. The minimum recommendation for a diabetic is to see an eye doctor at least once a year to have his or her eyes dilated. This lets the doctor check the retina and the blood vessels inside the retina for signs of diabetic retinopathy. Diabetic retinopathy occurs when diabetes damages the tiny blood vessels inside the retina. There is also an increased instance of glaucoma in diabetics, which can lead to blindness if untreated.



It's all about prevention, says Dr. DeMaio. "Diabetes is the leading cause of preventable blindness. So if diabetes goes unchecked and the eyes go unchecked, you can have vision loss or permanent blindness."

Even if you are perfectly healthy, you should still seek yearly eye care to maintain healthy eyes because there are several "silent" eye conditions that you wouldn't know you had unless you had an eye examination once a year. "If there are any sudden changes in vision, get in

touch with your medical doctor or eye doctor as soon as possible," shares Dr. DeMaio.

"These tests are not just eye exams for glasses. These are more involved tests. The key is that it's a dilated eye exam and not just a check for glasses."

Dr. DeMaio also stresses the importance of daily eye health. He recommends always using protection from UV light, such as wearing sunglasses, and taking antioxidants to promote good health. ↪

 Quality Insights
Quality Insights of Pennsylvania
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