

Media release
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E-HEALTH TO ASSIST TREATING MENTAL HEALTH

Continuity of care for patients suffering mental health issues could be greatly improved with the introduction of e-health according to the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners.

The potential future individual electronic health record (IEHR) will give healthcare providers better access to patient information and improve information-sharing among different health care professionals, leading to better quality care for patients.

Typically, mental health patients visit a number of healthcare providers and it is possible for a patient to have a GP, psychologist and psychiatrist and also deal with other health professionals, pharmacists and even rehabilitation programs, who all need accurate and up to date information about the patient's care and medication.

The impact of mental health within the Australian population is substantial with twenty per cent of Australian adults affected by some form of mental disorder every year and GPs are often the first point of contact.

Dr Chris Mitchell, RACGP President and GP in northern New South Wales said that the process of linking information back to the GP is critically important.

"There needs to be a shared understanding of the treatments undertaken for a patient, particularly in relation to medications prescribed and the value of that information for the GP is critical in "closing the loop".

"A consolidated medicine summary, as will be provided with the e-health system, will allow the GP to see when medication has been changed and lead to a better outcome for the patient with all healthcare providers having access to the same information," he said.

"Patients with mental health illnesses are part of a vulnerable "at-risk" group and we believe their quality of care can be improved with the introduction of a national e-health infrastructure.

"Individual healthcare identifiers are the key that will unlock e-health for Australians.

"Every person in Australia should receive care that is informed by an electronic health summary. The passage of the *Healthcare Identifiers Bill 2010* is an essential step to enable e-health innovation and efficiency," said Dr Mitchell.

To ensure that GPs can deliver the highest standard of care to their patients, the RACGP is ensuring that the National E-Health Transition Authority (NEHTA) is informed of what is reasonable, workable and useful for GPs when leading the progression of e-health in Australia. NEHTA is the lead organisation supporting the national vision for e-health in Australia.

Dr Caroline Johnson, who is a member of the RACGP National Standing Committee - Quality Care, the RACGP representative on the Mental Health Professionals' Association (MHPA) and a GP, said that patient confidentiality is a very sensitive issue in the area of mental health.

"Awareness of consumer and carer issues is crucial. RACGP members are very aware of the particular sensitivities related to the use of and access to diagnostic labels in this area.

"Mental health patients often already feel stigmatised, so we want to be sure that the information used and shared via e-health is always for their benefit. The whole issue of trust and confidentiality is one to be looked at very closely and quality collaboration between health professionals is a vital part of patient care.

"In situations where the patient is highly distressed or confused, for example, hospital emergency settings, getting accurate information quickly about a patient through e-health could potentially result in better outcomes," said Dr Johnson.

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NEHTA

The National E-Health Transition Authority Limited was established by the Australian Commonwealth, State and Territory governments on July 5th, 2005 to develop better ways of electronically collecting and securely exchanging health information.

NEHTA is the lead organisation supporting the national vision for e-health in Australia; working openly, constructively and collaboratively with consumers, providers, funders, policy makers and the broader healthcare industry; to enable safer, higher quality, accessible, equitable, efficient and sustainable healthcare.

RACGP

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners is the professional organisation that sets and maintains the standards for quality clinical practice, education, training and research in Australian general practice and represents Australia's urban and rural general practitioners.