

The Personal Health Record (PHR) is Alive and Well! Meet Zweena.

☒ A personal health record (or PHR) is an individual electronic health record that is stored securely on the Internet so it can be accessed by medical providers and caregivers who have permission.

PHRs allow the storage of all critical health history information in one place. In the event of an emergency, the patient, caregiver or family member can give providers access to health information. By having the most current information always available, duplicate or unnecessary tests can be avoided as can possible drug interactions. This benefit is achieved without having to rely on the memory or incomplete records of the patient. PHRs also allow patients, caregivers or third-party vendors to update information regularly over the Internet so that new data can always be accessed by stakeholders.

Although Personal Health Records have been around for more than 10 years, they have gained little traction. Amidst a healthcare environment that is increasingly supportive of the empowered patient, most patients have neither the time nor the knowledge to enter their own records into a PHR. Many PHRs can interface with an individual hospital or physician's EHR system, but most are unable to share information bi-directionally with more than one entity or flow seamlessly into a Health Information Exchange (HIE).

With that being said, PHRs could be poised to make a big impact on the future of the delivery of health services. Today's providers are shifting their focus from individual visits to entire episodes of care across the care continuum,

which has the potential to benefit from digitized patient records. As more providers convert to electronic medical records, one of the next steps towards fulfilling the Meaningful Use criteria needed to receive Federal incentive payments is to achieve Enterprise Integration with their electronic records, defined by the HITECH act as:

“the electronic linkage of health care providers, health plans, the government, and other interested parties, to enable the electronic exchange and use of health information among all the components in the health care infrastructure in accordance with applicable law.”

In short, healthcare providers have to adopt systems that can then interface with other providers to share patient data, and collect public health data for comparative effectiveness research.

Although the death of Google Health this year has led many to speculate that the PHR is an idea too far ahead of its time, Zweena is challenging that notion.

Zweena is a personal health record management solution, as opposed to a standalone PHR. Zweena overcomes the traditional downfall of PHRs by taking care of everything for the patient and bridging the (huge) gap between healthcare providers and patients. Upon request by the patient, Zweena contacts the patient's care providers, requesting their records and entering the record information into the PHR properly. The patient record, accessible via Microsoft Healthvault, is then available for easy exchange with hospitals, physician offices, continuing care communities, family members and others permissioned by the patient.

Zweena is involved in a fascinating pilot program starting October 2011. Virtua Hospital in Southern New Jersey has contracted with Zweena to provide ALL residents in a three-county area a free PHR with all the heavy lifting done by

Zweena. This three-year agreement will be a tremendous test of the concept of the personal health record and the improvement of health and healthcare for these communities.

Zweena CEO John Phelan comments, "Most of us only think about our health and our medical records when we are reacting to a health crisis. By then, it is too late to harness the power of our assembled health information. Zweena gives all of us an opportunity to use the information we have today and be more proactive and engaged with our own health information and the information for those we love and care for."

Image by Mary Pat Whaley

This article was first posted on Technorati.

Google Health's Newest Version Makes Personal Health Records Accessible to Visually Impaired Users

☒ **Google Health announced today** that the newest version of its patient-managed medical record is accessible to visually-impaired users. Using voice prompts and auditory icons, users of assistive technology are now able to open Google Health profiles and populate them with their own medical information including vitals, conditions, medications, allergies, procedures, test results and immunizations.

Assistive technology such as screen readers, which translate text into speech or text into Braille, offer computer access

to the blind, visually impaired and illiterate.

Writing about the launch of Google Health's newest enhancement, Google Blogger and Research Scientist T.V. Raman, notes that

"Google Health gives me a single unified web interface to manage all of my health-related information. Kudos to the Google Health and GWT teams for creating an extremely useful and usable solution!"

T.V. Raman is also the author of Emacspeak, a speech interface available free on the Internet that allows visually-impaired users to access computer applications, including video gaming. T.V. Raman, himself a visually-impaired user, discusses the software requirements to use the Google Health.

"Note that the accessibility support in Google Health requires support from both the browser as well as the adaptive technology in use. At present, we recommend Firefox 3.0 with screenreaders that support ARIA, alternatively, you can also use Fire Vox, the self-voicing extension to Firefox 3.0."

In addition to improving accessibility for users, Google Health continues to seek relationships with **innovators in healthcare**, including those developing applications for disease management, secure messaging, and research.

Look at Google Health here.