



WHY YOU SHOULD CARE ABOUT YOUR MEDICAL HOME

John A. Schmidt, MD

Everyone knows how important “home” is. A home is a place where we grow up, are cared for, and receive nourishment; in short, a home is an enclave where we get the physical and emotional support we need to stay happy and healthy. A Medical Home is no different. It is where all of your health care providers give you the attention and care you need to be healthy and whole. I intentionally chose the broad phrase “health care providers” because most of us depend on many professionals to stay healthy. Your dentist, your chiropractor, your primary care physician and heart specialist; your pharmacist and nurse all have an important role in keeping you healthy in unique and complementary ways. As health care becomes increasingly specialized, your home team gets bigger.

In a home, people are constantly sharing information and no piece of information is too trivial if it leads to better home life. We talk about the things we eat, how we slept, the morning and evening news, our successes and our failures. And if something is personal, we “keep it in the family.” Likewise, in a medical home there is a lot of important personal information to be shared but “kept in the family.” If your cardiologist puts you on a blood thinner to protect your heart, your dentist needs to know before she extracts your tooth. If your orthopedist wishes to prescribe ibuprofen for a twisted ankle, he needs to know that you once had an ulcer. Your chiropractor should have the results of that spine MRI you had a few years back for sciatica, and so on. When information is shared in a timely and confidential manner, you are safe and your home is secure.

By now you must think this a fairytale. My health care providers aren’t family and they certainly don’t live under one roof! In fact they hardly speak to each other! It seems like I’m the one who constantly reminds them of things! My chart is like a phonebook and my doctor has trouble finding his own data let alone sharing it with others! Another pleasant fiction dispelled! Let us begin again.

The Medical Home concept is emerging as a way to improve your health care but its implementation requires at least two innovations. First, there needs to be a coordinator and it shouldn’t be you. The concept of shared responsibility too often means no one is responsible. Second, the same technology that allows Boeing engineers to build a highly complex “home in the sky” should be used to assemble and organize all of the data generated by your home team so that it is accessible to you and your healthcare providers.

A Medical Home is a medical practice that cares for the entire patient. You work with your Personal Physician to design and build your Medical Home. Your Personal Physician and Medical Home Builder, will look after and manage all of your care. Think of him/her as a general contractor. A general contractor works with many specialists – framers, electricians, and plumbers to build a home. All of the

Meaningful Medicine

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work provided by these specialists needs to be coordinated and managed to ensure that your home is built right and to your liking. Your Personal Physician will work with your medical specialists and build your Medical Home in the same way.

Just as every home needs a foundation, some elements are common to every Medical Home, like Electronic Medical Records and patient access to their personal health information via a secure password. Other features can be selected to customize the Medical Home to better satisfy the patient's needs.

A Medical Homes uses the latest information technology to organize the patient's Personal Health information into an easy-to-use and completely secure Electronic Medical Record. Your Electronic Medical Record is updated by your health care providers after every visit, every test, and every change to your medications. This allows your Personal Physician to have complete information on your care so he/she can anticipate problems before they happen and keep you healthy.

Patients can access their Electronic Medical Record from their Personal Physician's Patient Portal. This give patients access to their diagnoses, medications, doctor's recommendations and test results on line. Patients can also ask questions and receive answers. In addition, there is typically a "To Do" and "Completed Task" feature so patients can keep on schedule with their medical care. Patients can make appointments and request prescription refills online as well.

As medicine becomes more complex and patients wish to become more involved in their medical care, there is a real need to coordinate care, minimize redundancy, and give patients greater access to their confidential medical information no matter where they may happen to be geographically. As long as you have access to the Internet, you can access your Medical Home.

About John A. Schmidt, MD

As one of the first physicians to provide patients with a Medical Home in Monmouth County, New Jersey, Dr. Schmidt coordinates care for his patients. He works with their specialists and other healthcare providers to ensure that his patients have everything that they need to stay healthy and well. Dr. Schmidt accomplishes this by managing his patients' Personal Health Information. Specialists and other providers update Dr. Schmidt on the care they give so that he has a complete picture of what is going on in their Electronic Medical Record. Patients benefit from his proactive approach. The duplication of tests and procedures is minimized, as well as the risk of potentially dangerous drug interactions. He is among the first to provide patients direct Internet access to their Personal Health Information through a secure, password-protected, Patient Portal available on his website. Dr. Schmidt provides information on Medical Homes, Electronic Medical Records and heath care on his blog at www.schmidtmd.com.