

MOH wants to make national patient database mandatory

All health providers, even GPs, will have to upload health details if plans are approved

The Ministry of Health (MOH) wants to make it compulsory for all healthcare providers to upload data to the National Electronic Health Record (NEHR) system - from large hospitals all the way down to the neighbourhood GP clinic.

This means that every aspect of a person's medical history, including visits to doctors in the private sector, chronic medication, allergies and vaccination details, will be captured in these records.

These plans come on the back of a slow take-up rate from the private healthcare sector in the six years since the NEHR was launched in 2011.

Sharing medical data in a national electronic repository will make for more seamless treatment and save money for patients, said the Government.

Singapore is one of the first countries to have established such a comprehensive system. The records, however, will not include details such as doctors' personal case notes, as they are meant chiefly to provide a summary.

Currently, most NEHR data comes from public sector institutions such as public hospitals and polyclinics.

Only 3 per cent of the more than 4,000 private healthcare providers - including specialist clinics, nursing homes and hospices - contribute to the scheme.

This is despite the fact that a quarter of them have access to it and can view patient records.

"Patients can realise the full potential of the NEHR only if the data is comprehensive," said Health Minister Gan Kim Yong, who made the announcement yesterday at the start of the three-day FutureHealth Conference. The conference was jointly organised by Nanyang Technological University and the Centre for Healthcare Innovation.

"And for NEHR data to be comprehensive, every provider and healthcare professional needs to contribute relevant data to it," he added.

The proposed changes will likely be tabled in Parliament next year. If approved, healthcare groups will be given a grace period of two to three years to make the necessary preparations.

Early adopters who start contributing data by June 2019 will be able to claim a one-off amount from MOH to offset the costs of upgrading their systems.

A \$20 million fund has been set aside for this, said Mr Gan.

He added that MOH will be organising workshops for doctors to help them understand the new requirements.

Workshops will also be conducted for IT vendors who help doctors provide such electronic clinical management services.

MOH plans to introduce the changes under the Healthcare Services Act so that all health-care providers will be legally obliged to follow through with its plans. If the changes go through, those who do not comply will likely face penalties.

"This will not be an easy journey," said Mr Bruce Liang, MOH's chief information officer and chief executive of the Integrated Health Information Systems.

"However, it is a journey we must make, as a strong digital backbone is essential in meeting our patients' and healthcare system's needs in the future."

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