Online Tool Helps Manage Personal Health Information

AARP and Microsoft Corp. have launched AARP Health Record (http://www.aarp.org/healthrecord), a security-enhanced online service designed to help people 50 and older manage and improve their health. This new tool enables users to enter, store, and edit their personal health information in a central location and share it selectively with caregivers, family members, physicians, and other health care providers.

AARP Health Record, which is free to AARP members and available in both English and Spanish, makes it easy to create and maintain security-enhanced, up-to-date electronic records that can be accessed from an Internet connection. By storing all of their health information (e.g., blood type, drug allergies, medications, personal and family health history, emergency and provider contact information) in one location, members can partner more effectively with their physicians and other health care providers, be better prepared for emergencies, and reduce wasteful and redundant paperwork. Members can also print and carry an easy-to-read wallet card with their vital health statistics.

AARP Health Record connects to Microsoft HealthVault, a privacy- and security-enhanced online platform that enables individuals to compile and store personal health information from multiple sources in a single location and to create additional profiles for their spouse, children, aging parents, or anyone whose health they need to monitor or help manage.


Home-Bound Seniors Encouraged to Vote

Homebound Americans who have difficulty traveling to polling places during the 2012 election cycle will have help casting their votes, thanks to a collaborative initiative launched by state home health care associations and other leaders in America’s home health care community. The Bring the Vote Home initiative aims to engage the nation’s 12 million home health care patients—including 3.5 million Medicare beneficiaries—via voter and absentee ballot registration initiatives.

As part of the initiative, the home health care community is launching a new website, http://www.bringthevotehome.org, which offers state-specific information and instructions for voter and absentee ballot registration. Further, home health care caregivers will directly assist patients and their families during the registration process and provide information on how to obtain absentee voter materials.


Alcohol Overuse Increases Risk of Cognitive Decline

Two studies reported at the Alzheimer’s Association International Conference 2012 suggest that moderate alcohol use in late life, heavier use earlier in life, and binge drinking in late life increase risk of cognitive decline.

Researchers followed more than 1,300 women 65 and older for 20 years. They measured frequency of current and past alcohol use at the beginning, midpoint (Years 6 and 8), and late phases (Years 10 and 16) of the study. The researchers assessed participants at the end of the study for mild cognitive impairment and dementia. At baseline, 40.6% were non-drinkers, 50.4% were light drinkers (0 to 7 drinks per week), and 9% were moderate drinkers (7 to 14 drinks per week). Heavy drinkers (14 drinks per week) were excluded.

The researchers found that:
- Women who reported drinking more in the past than at the beginning of the study were at 30% increased risk of developing cognitive impairment.
- Moderate drinkers at baseline or at midpoint had similar risk
of cognitive impairment to non-drinkers; however, moderate drinkers in the late phase of the study were approximately 60% more likely to develop cognitive impairment.

- Women who changed from nondrinking to drinking over the course of the study had a 200% increased risk of cognitive impairment.

In a separate study, researchers performed a secondary analysis of data from 5,075 participants 65 and older in the Health and Retirement Study—a biennial, longitudinal, nationally representative survey of U.S. adults 50 and older—to assess the effects of binge drinking on cognition and mood in older people. Baseline data were collected in 2002 and participants were followed for 8 years. Consumption of four or more drinks on one occasion was considered binge drinking. Cognitive function and memory were assessed using the Telephone Interview for Cognitive Status. The researchers found that:

- Binge drinking once per month or more was reported by 8.3% of men and 1.5% of women; binge drinking twice per month or more was reported by 4.3% of men and 0.5% of women. Outcomes were similar in men and women when analyzed separately.

- Participants who reported heavy episodic drinking once per month were 62% more likely to be in the group experiencing the highest decline in cognitive function and were 27% more likely to be in the group experiencing the highest amount of memory decline.

- Participants reporting heavy episodic drinking twice per month or more were 147% more likely to be in the group experiencing the highest decline in cognitive function and were 149% more likely to be in the group experiencing the highest amount of decline in memory.


iPads Help Patients Feel at Home

Windsor Healthcare Communities, which operates nine sub-acute and nursing facilities in New Jersey, has partnered with PadInMotion to offer an innovative iPad service at its Merwick Care & Rehabilitation Center location that promises to enhance participating patients’ and residents’ experiences in the facility.

Patients, residents, family, and friends now have the ability to rent customizable iPads that come preloaded with their choice of content, including movies, television shows, books, newspapers, and magazines, along with complimentary WiFi.

Windsor Healthcare also views the iPad as therapeutic, due to its touch screen sensibility, and plans to use the device as a medical knowledge base for patients. The iPads can be stocked with guides that detail the exercise plans patients will be asked to complete once they return home, allowing them to prepare for those exercises on their own while still at the Merwick facility. Documents can also be added to help educate patients about their condition.

PadInMotion handles the rental and distribution of the devices and is onsite at Merwick every day to take orders, deliver and collect iPads, and make sure patients are comfortable using their new tool. Additionally, PadInMotion disinfects the iPads following the same procedures that hospitals follow to disinfect electronic devices. Renters pay a minimum of $10 per day for short-term rental of the iPad, plus the cost of any additional media they have preloaded.


Brain Exercise Helps Older Adults’ Cognition

University of California, Los Angeles researchers found that older adults who regularly use a brain fitness program played on a computer demonstrated significantly improved memory and language skills. The study received a Blue Ribbon Award from the American Psychological Association during the organization’s annual convention.

The team studied 59 participants (mean age = 84) recruited from local retirement communities in Southern California. The volunteers were split into two groups: The first group used a brain fitness program for an average of 73.5 20-minute sessions across a 6-month period; a second group played it less than 45 times during the same time period. Researchers found that the first group demonstrated significantly higher improvement in memory and language skills compared with the second group.

The study’s findings add to the field exploring whether such brain fitness tools may help improve language and memory and ultimately help protect individuals from the cognitive decline associated with aging and Alzheimer’s disease.