Your Chart, In the Cloud

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Everything about healthcare these days has become a hot-button issue, even down to digitizing medical
records. This was one of Barack Obama's top technology talking points on the campaign trail. But so far,
progress on this front has been slow. According to a report co-authored by University of Virginia
economics professor Amalia Miller, a big hindrance to getting medical records digitized is privacy
protection, such as HIPAA and state regulations.

So while doctors, hospitals, and insurance companies are dragging their feet, the Web has stepped up as
a way for individuals to take matters into their own hands. Specifically, companies such as Google and
Microsoft are creating ways to put your chart in the cloud.

For example, Google Health, which launched in October, lets users import their medical
records, fill prescriptions, get lab results, set up text-based pill alerts, and keep track of
immunizations. The service has partnered with pharmacies like Walgreens and CVS, as
well as the American Heart Association and medical testing facility Quest Diagnostics.

Users can opt to share their information with such partners, but currently such sharing
is an all-or-nothing venture. You can't choose to share only portions of your records (functionality Google
says is coming soon).

For those who feel the Web opens their medical data to prying eyes, Roni Zeiger, Google Health product
manager, says that the records entered into Google Health remain completely private.

"No Google Health user will ever find their health information as search results on Google," Zeiger says.
"That information is yours and only you have access to it."

Though Google Health has made a big splash, Microsoft has actually been in the game longer, with its
HealthVault. Along with storing medical records, HealthVault also lets you share those records as well as
access health-related articles.

A site named RememberItNow has taken a slightly different tack. Instead of serving as an online filing
cabinet for your medical history, the site is geared toward caregivers. After uploading the medical records
of a person you are caring for, you can use RememberItNow to track doctors' appointments and
remember medication schedules. The service uses e-mail and SMS reminders, as well as tracks overall
well-being with a health journal and other tools. The fee for this service is $24 a month.

So how can such services exist amid the strict HIPAA and state laws? Google Health's information page
states: "Unlike a doctor or health plan, Google Health is not regulated by HIPAA. This is because Google
does not store data on behalf of health care providers. Instead, our primary relationship is with the user."

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