How does one gather their scattered medical records? [1]

Dear Alice,

Is there a service I can employ? I know for a fact that I've never used health insurance to cover anything. I also know that I've been to different hospitals for different issues. Any help is appreciated.

Answer

Dear Reader,

Unfortunately, there isn't one service that can compile all of your medical records for you. To compile your medical records involves submitting a record request to each facility from which you have received medical care. Facilities are required to keep patient records of adults for six years from the date of their last visit. HIPAA, or the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996, gives patients the right to access, have copies of, and ask for amendments to these medical records. It also sets standards for the privacy and protection of your health information.

To obtain a medical record, get in touch with the Health Information Management (HIM), Medical Records, or Health Information Services Department, at the facility from which you received care and ask for details about their record request process, including fees. At smaller practices, you may need to ask for the staff member who handles patient records. Providers maintain health records on a facility-by-facility basis, so record requests have to be made individually to each place you have gone for care. You will most likely be required to sign an authorization form and may need to provide legal documentation confirming your identity. The time it takes to get your records will vary by facility, but HIPAA sets a maximum of 30 days, with the possibility of a 30-day extension in some circumstances. You may be charged a fee, but a facility may not deny you access to your medical records based on an inability to pay.

Once you have received your records, you may want to store your information in a file folder, USB drive, or employ a Web-based service that allows you to input and access your records online. Make sure to store hard copies in a secure place and password-protect electronic copies of your record to protect your health information.

Having a copy of your medical records can be extremely beneficial. Not only can having comprehensive records help new healthcare providers care for you more effectively, but you can also use your health information to monitor your treatment and avoid unnecessary procedures, such as repeat tests. The practice of maintaining a complete medical record can
also help you save money by reducing redundant care.

Good luck!

Alice!
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