

What is AAFP Physicians Direct?

AAFP Physicians Direct is a new service that supports secure, electronic communication between physicians and other health care providers. Built on the Surescripts Network for Clinical Interoperability, this new AAFP service is part of a larger program to help physicians more easily and securely share information.

What kinds of data can be communicated using Physicians Direct?

Physicians Direct will allow providers to more easily and securely share information such as referrals, patient summaries, discharge summaries and lab results.

How, exactly, does it work?

AAFP Physicians Direct is easy to use. To begin service, subscribers need only a connection to the Internet and access to one of the popular web browsers such as Internet Explorer or Mozilla Firefox. A subscriber will open an account on the AAFP Physicians Direct web portal, obtain an ID and password after authentication, and then be able to send and receive secure messages and attachments with any other member of the Surescripts network. AAFP physicians will be able to connect to the Surescripts network and share information securely through the new AAFP Physicians Direct web portal or a choice of electronic health record systems.

Which EHRs are going to support this new service and program?

Amazing Charts, e-MDs and SOAPware will connect their EHR systems to the Surescripts network and collaborate in the Physicians Direct program. Stay tuned for more.

What direct benefit does AAFP Physicians Direct offer to physicians, their practice, and their patients?

It will make their practice run more efficiently while improving the overall quality of care they provide. Patients will experience more seamless coordination and continuity of care.

When will it be available?

Q2 of 2011.

How much does it cost?

AAFP Physicians Direct will be offered as a subscription service for \$15 per physician user per month. Subscribers will not be limited in the number of messages they can send through the secure portal.

How does it support meaningful use?

Physicians who subscribe to AAFP Physicians Direct will be closer to achieving the Meaningful Use objectives and to obtaining EHR incentive payments of up to \$44,000 from Medicare or \$63,500 from Medicaid. Stage 1 objectives include the capability for electronic health data exchange with colleagues, and for electronic provision of clinical summaries to patients who request them. Stage 2 and 3 objectives will raise the bar on these exchange capabilities to include a percentage of referrals made electronically, and making electronic communications with patients routine. AAFP Physicians Direct is capable of meeting all of these objectives.

How does Physicians Direct support the federal government's standards for health information exchange?

The AAFP, Surescripts and many other organizations have collaborated with the federal government to create the standard protocols to make health information exchange possible. AAFP Physicians Direct will support all federal and state policies and standards for health information exchange, including privacy and security standards (such as HIPAA and state law), as well as technology interoperability standards and message types such as HL7, CCR and CCD. Use of standard protocols will allow AAFP physicians to communicate via the Surescripts network with any other physicians, whether they connect via an EHR, through a health information exchange or large hospital system, through a portal, or physicians using the new Direct Project protocols for clinical exchange.

Why is the AAFP providing this service? What do the AAFP and Surescripts hope to achieve?

To help physicians more easily and securely share information such as referrals, patient summaries, discharge summaries and lab results when providing their patients' care. In doing so, AAFP and Surescripts aim to improve continuity of care; support the "meaningful use" of electronic health records and advance the patient-centered medical home model of care.

How often do physicians communicate with one another today?

A recent study by the Center for Studying Health System Change showed that primary care and subspecialist physicians have decidedly different views about how often their colleagues communicate with them. They found that 69.3 percent of primary care physicians reported regularly — "always" or "most of the time" — sending a patient's history and the reason for the referral to the subspecialist, but only 34.8 percent of subspecialists said they regularly receive such information. On the flip side, 80.6 percent of subspecialists said they regularly send consultation results to the referring PCP, but only 62.2 percent of PCPs said they received such information, the study found.

Primary care and subspecialist physicians who did not receive timely communication regarding referrals and consultations were more likely to report that their ability to provide high-quality care was threatened.

If a physician is already faxing their consultants, why would they need AAFP Physicians Direct?

Subscribers to AAFP Physicians Direct will reduce the amount of fax, mail, and courier service their medical practices use, thus facilitating optimal information flow and decreasing hassles and costs associated with paper document systems. Physicians Direct is also more secure means of sharing information between physicians – anyone can pick up a fax; anyone can dial a wrong fax number.