

# How Direct Improves Teamwork

In today's healthcare environment access to timely information is vital to providing quality care. In using Direct, providers are able to push health information quickly and securely with the provider team and patients. Direct functions like an encrypted email which makes it possible for providers to push messages that can only be accessed by the intended recipient. Providers can utilize Direct at any point in their adoption of electronic health records – before they acquire an EHR or to achieve milestones in the attainment of Meaningful Use. Below is one example of how Direct can be used when a primary care provider (Dr. Jones) refers a patient to a specialist (Dr. Anderson).

**Dr. Jones, Primary Care Provider**

- Utilize Direct to securely push patient medical information to Dr. Anderson.

1

**Dr. Anderson, Specialist**

- Receive patient medical information securely via Direct.
- Push any necessary diagnostic orders to the laboratory.

2

**Laboratory**

- Obtain diagnostic orders to proceed with necessary procedures and tests.
- Communicate with Dr. Anderson as needed.

3

**Patient**

- Experience a seamless referral when all members of the care team have access to the same medical information.
- Receive patient treatment plan and incorporate into personal health record.

4

Legend  
— Secure Data Transfer

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## What is Direct?

Direct is a standards-based transportation mechanism that can help healthcare professionals securely send messages to other providers, patients or other authorized entities such as hospitals, pharmacies and laboratories. Direct is similar to email but includes special security requirements to encrypt health data and ensure the receiver has been authenticated. Direct is a cost-effective and scalable option providers can use to quickly and securely send messages to trusted recipients without having to connect to sophisticated exchange services. The use of Direct will become more widespread as it will be integrated into 2014 Edition Electronic Health Record Certification Criteria.

## What Are the Benefits

### Enhanced Communication

Mail and fax can be slow, inconvenient and expensive. Additionally, when exchanging hard copies of patient data, there is little to no audit trail. With Direct, there will always be an audit trail and users will know exactly when each message is sent and received.

### Additional Security

Direct's encryption features ensure access only by the intended recipients which safeguards personal health information.

### Fulfill Meaningful Use Requirements

Direct can help providers fulfill several meaningful use requirements including communicating with patients, public health entities, other providers and authorized entities.

#### *Communicating with Patients*

- Discharge instructions
- Clinical summaries
- Reminders
- Other health information

#### *Communicating with Public Health Entities (\*Check with your State Health Department to determine participation and acceptance of Direct)*

- Immunization registries
- Syndromic surveillance
- Laboratory reporting

#### *Communicating with Other Providers/Authorized Entities*

- Clinical information
- Laboratory reporting
- Referrals and other transitions in care such as a summary of care record

### Easy Adaptation

The exchange of health information between two unaffiliated organizations takes a large investment of time and resources. Direct does not replace more sophisticated methods of exchange. Rather Direct can meet information exchange needs now while allowing for assessment of future forms of exchange that providers may consider implementing.

### Interoperability

Direct is vendor neutral. Because Direct uses the same set of standards for any EHR product, messages can be sent to any authorized entity regardless of what EHR product they use.

### Patient Engagement

Direct provides a fast and secure way for data to follow the patient. Whether a Direct message is sent to facilitate a referral or coordinate lab results, patient care will become more coordinated and seamless if the patients' data is waiting for them. Patients are also becoming more engaged in their own health data and can easily receive Direct messages through patient portals or personal health records.

## Local Assistance Available

Local Regional Extension Centers (RECs) are a vital source for education, outreach and training on a broad array of topics, including Direct. They are available to answer additional questions or to provide the following services:

- Help select a vendor to meet an organization's needs.
- Provide education and training on Direct as well as workflow best practices.
- Offer one-on-one guidance on understanding meaningful use requirements and how Direct can help providers reach Stage 1 and prepare for Stage 2.
- Assist in navigating different exchange options associated with Direct.