

# Age of Consent: Contentions with a Seamless Health Record

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## Abstract and Objectives

*The intent of this poster is to explore, within a Canadian context, the opportunities, challenges and complexities of applying informed consent procedures within the context of a seamless electronic health record environment that serves as a forward-looking decision support system, rather than the more traditional retrospective view of the data subject's health experience.*

### Keywords:

Informed consent, Seamless electronic health record

## Introduction

In setting the Canadian context, the Canada Health Infoway (*Infoway*) model was initially created in 2001 as a model for a pan-Canadian public health information system, with the intent of having the Government of Canada work with the provinces and territories to implement and reuse compatible electronic health record systems which support a safer, more efficient healthcare system [1].

## Discussion

Development of a network of interoperable electronic health record solutions across Canada that link clinics, hospitals, pharmacies and other points of care is designed to improve Canadians' access to healthcare services, enhance the quality of care and make the healthcare system more productive. The intention is that such an Electronic Health Record (EHR) would provide authorized healthcare professionals with immediate access to their patients' accurate lifetime health histories, including laboratory and radiology test results, past treatments, prescription drug profiles and immunizations, while protecting privacy and confidentiality. The EHR would support improved clinical decision-making leading to more effective diagnosis and treatment, greater patient safety, increased efficiency and improved access to services [1]. Although the vision of Infoway seems remarkably clear and the benefits almost self evident, the processes by which we would be able to operationalize the desired seamless EHR environment, while respecting data subjects rights and informed consent processes, seem less clear [2].

Property rights in information, patient-physician trust, function creep, information valuation, information security, surveillance and the application of lockboxes are all key considerations in balancing informed consent processes with the efficiencies offered with a seamless electronic health record environment. Redefining the informed consent practices, that have traditionally formed an integral part of the establishing a trusting doctor-patient relationship in the administering of health services, appear to be at the centre of this discussion. Preserving this sense of trust in a highly codified environment is a non-trivial exercise in being able to deliver the seamless EHR environment envisioned by *Infoway*. Adding to the complexity, in the past decade, the generation who were raised with personal computers and the internet in their homes has reached the age of majority. As a result, traditional values and practices surrounding privacy, confidentiality and security of information continue to be challenged.

## Conclusion

Informed consent processes are pivotal in the evolving societal and cultural tolerances around privacy and security of personal information. Given a socially sensitive approach to informed consent processes, future requirements for electronic health records design could include an increasingly patient-centric view, enhancing seamless access to an extended suite of information sets and affording improved analytical capability to assess alternative futures in making proactive decisions about current exposures and anticipated future health outcomes.

## References

- [1] Canada Health Infoway. EHR 2015: Advancing Canada's next generation of Healthcare. Canada Health Infoway. Government of Canada. 2009.
- [2] Health Council of Canada, Value for Money: Making Canadian Health Care Stronger. Health Council of Canada, Government of Canada. 2009.