

Accessing Health Info Wherever You Are! *by Kim Lucas, MD*

More and more interaction between patients, their insurance companies and doctors' offices will be happening via the internet. Access to the most up-to-date information regarding benefits, drug formularies and in-network providers occurs on the internet thanks to the ability to dynamically post changes and additions. Alternatives are a) printed directories (which may be already outdated even as it goes to print), and b) the phone, which often involves longer wait times and increases the possibility to miscommunication.

Approximately 50% of older seniors are using a computer. The percentage is slightly higher for smart phones although it's not clear how much internet use is happening on the smart phone.

Keeping up is a challenge for every age as we all get comfortable with what is familiar and easy. Keeping equipment

current and being able to set up and troubleshoot equipment and networks is another aspect that needs attention and can serve as another disincentive to dive in. However, there is usually a family member or friend who can lend assistance with most modifications being able to be handled over the phone. Current equipment and software is, for the most part, very user friendly and keeps getting easier.

One reason I hear patients resist going on the internet is that they "don't want all their information out there." Some concern is reasonable and there are simple rules one can follow to avoid scams. The key difference is that we are talking about accessing information rather than giving out information. When it comes to accessing information, what is required is creating a log-in account which usually requires a

password. While generating unique passwords and keeping track of them is somewhat onerous, there are guidelines and programs that can help.

Cost can pose a barrier to using a computer. Most companies offer good bundled packages and the cost of mobile access via smart phones has gone down in recent years. For those with visual impairments, additional solutions are available.

Lastly if you are unable to access the internet yourself, a good solution is to have a willing, able and trusted family member designated as your liaison to the internet.

With persistence, patience and some good help you should be able to make meaningful progress in this digital age. Good luck!

Are You Registered on Our Patient Portal?

All Thunderbird Internal Medicine patients are encouraged to register on the patient portal which provides a number of tools to simplify scheduling, prescription refills, billing and other tasks. Simply log in to www.thunderbirdim.com and click on the Patient Login icon on the top of the home page.

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