

Will Check-in at Doctors office get smart?

Imagine the day when patients can use their smart card to perform self-service check-in without any human interventions or long wait. Well, those days are here at Central Medical Center (CMC) in Santa Clara, CA. Till now, the cost factor was prohibiting the smaller health care providers such as CMC to implement smart cost system. However, CMS was able to carry out the pilot project for modest amount of \$1000 for 200 patients. They only needed to purchase cards around \$5 per patients. The main reason for the relatively low cost of implementation is that CMC uses off-the-shelf EMR system called Digital Clinic by Medico System Inc. that has an integrated Smart card system for patient check-in that allows key medical data will be at provider's workflow as soon as a patient slides his/her smart card into the reader. Furthermore, staff can also use their smart cards to sign on to the Digital Clinic.

Dr Cho believes using smart card for admitting patients to the clinic is a quick and inexpensive affair because there'll be less human interventions which frees front desk personals to perform their tasks. Smart card technology can also help them better meet HIPAA privacy and security requirements, along with additional requirements imposed by the need to protect electronic information.

The explosion of health care data brings up new challenges to the efficiency of patient care and privacy safeguards. Smart cards solve both challenges with secure storage and distribution of everything from emergency data to benefits status.

Rapid identification of patients; improved treatment

A convenient way to carry data between systems or to sites without systems

Reduction of records maintenance costs

A smart card resembles a credit card in size and shape, but similarity ends there. Traditional credit card is a simple piece of plastic with magnetic stripe. The inside of a smart card usually contains an embedded 8-bit microprocessor. The microprocessor is under a gold contact pad on one side of the card. Think of the microprocessor as replacing the usual magnetic stripe on a credit card which can store vital data including allergy information, emergency contact numbers, medication, prenatal information, and personal insurance data. All this gives doctors ready access to information they need to make quick and accurate medical decisions.

Even though smart cards have been around in their modern form for at least a decade, they are just starting to take off in the United States. However, health care organizations around the world especially in Europe have already implemented smart health cards for patients in various capacities. For example, every German citizen has a smart card for health insurance. 80 million smart cards were mailed to the insured and hundreds of thousands of physicians and dentists were equipped with PCs and smart card readers even the ambulance received mobile readers. In France, the state-owned social security organization (CNAM) set up a multi-phase project to equip each patient with a microprocessor-based smart card which will contain administrative data in first Phase, and administrative and medical data (the patient's medical history) in the second Phase. Practitioners will also receive smart ID cards carrying their electronic signature.

Dr. Cho from CMC believes that the idea has many benefits both for patients as well as the clinic. "It improves efficiency, lower administrative costs and improves patient access to medical care. Front desk will have more time to take care of other duties.

Patients don't have to wait just to be checked in, so it speeds up their office visit. Smart Card will allow them to have control over the check-in work flow. “