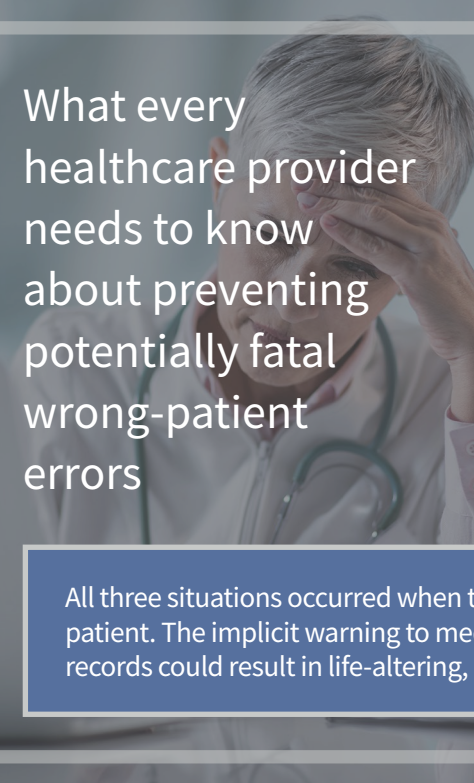# The right patient with the right record: patient linking across healthcare

What every healthcare provider needs to know about preventing potentially fatal wrong-patient errors
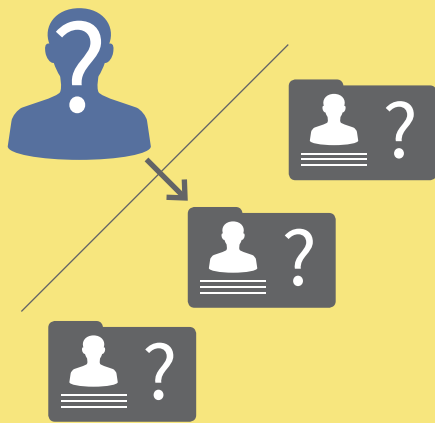
- A patient in cardiac arrest who did not sign a do-not-resuscitate order was not resuscitated because clinicians checked the patient's records and saw a do-not-resuscitate order.

- A hospital misidentified a patient who died and then harvested his organs even though he wasn't registered as an organ donor.

- A woman was given an incorrect cancer diagnosis and had surgery to remove a section of her rectum. She later found out the diagnosis was for a different patient.

All three situations occurred when the wrong medical records were matched to the patient. The implicit warning to medical professionals is clear: mismatched health records could result in life-altering, even fatal consequences for your patients.

LexisNexis® | Health Care
RISK SOLUTIONS

The shocking frequency of patient ID mix-ups

In 2016 the ECRI Institute Patient Safety Organization (PSO) reviewed 7,600 wrong-patient events occurring over a 32-month period.[1] The incidents were voluntarily reported by 181 health organizations, which means the real number is likely higher.

Fortunately, staff caught most mix-ups early, but not all. Approximately 9% of those errors resulted in a patient who was harmed or died.

Mismatches and duplicate records jeopardize patient safety and raise healthcare costs. They can lead to incorrect diagnosis and treatment, redundant tests and services, unnecessary hospitalizations and productivity loss.

Who's making mistakes?

Incorrect identification can occur anywhere on a patient's healthcare journey in any setting, from hospitals and nursing homes to physician offices and pharmacies. Every scan, lab test, doctor appointment and hospital stay becomes an additional point where mistakes can be introduced into the medical records.

Clerical errors like misspellings increase the odds of mix-ups. So does a lack of data standardization, such as whether to include a middle name versus middle initial and how to handle hyphenated names.

If healthcare staff can't locate a patient's record already in their system, they create a new record. A duplicate record spreads a patient's health data over multiple charts, so the record pulled up at any one time may be missing important details such as a patient's blood type, allergies and medications.

Data incompatibility poses a challenge

Interoperability presents another obstacle to linking health data and correctly identifying patients. Electronic medical records from disparate sources are often non-compatible, making data exchanges across different health systems complicated. When records can't be linked, doctors don't have access to all the information they need to make treatment decisions.

Disparate data must be cleansed and linked

Most healthcare providers lack the technology and resources to aggregate medical records data across care delivery systems. They can, however, turn to a third-party data management company for assistance. A data company can cleanse the records of errors and duplications. Then, using sophisticated linking technology, they can analyze records from multiple sources and connect records common to a single individual.

Finally, deep data assets that form a referential database are used to augment the data. Each additional piece of information improves the chances of matching patients correctly and provides a more detailed identity picture, which can then follow patients on their healthcare journey.

Patient safety is at stake

Incorporating electronic health records into standard clinical practice and the ability to exchange medical data have greatly advanced care coordination and delivery. But difficulties in patient data matching—ensuring the right patient is associated with the right record—mean the benefits have yet to be fully realized.

As technology advances and the quantity of health data continues to grow, providers need to work toward having clean, duplicate-free data and achieving nationwide interoperability. Nothing less than the viability of their business and the safety of their patients are at stake.

LexisNexis maintains more data than anyone else in the industry—65 billion public and proprietary records from 10,000+ sources. The scope of this data footprint combined with our proprietary linking capabilities offers healthcare organizations the ability to confidently identify and link patients with their health records across care delivery systems.

For more information, call 866.396.7703 or visit
lexisnexis.com/risk/healthcare

LexisNexis®
RISK SOLUTIONS | Health Care

[1] https://www.ecri.org/components/HRCAlerts/Pages/HRCAlerts092816_PatientID.aspx