

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions on the Enterprise Master Patient Index

Patients

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1.0 What is the Enterprise Master Patient Index?

The Enterprise Master Patient Index (EMPI) is a tool that stores and links demographic and selected personal information (e.g. your name, date of birth, medical record number, health card number) used by hospitals to identify individuals across institutions. Eventually, the EMPI will be connected to other health information systems in the province, such as radiology, lab and pharmacy information systems, as well as physician clinical office systems to allow all health care providers to uniquely identify patients, regardless of where they enter the health system. It is important to note that the EMPI does not contain clinical information.

2.0 Why does Ontario need an EMPI?

The EMPI provides the major building block needed to link personal health information that is stored in multiple locations to a single individual. It is the foundation for development of the interoperable electronic health record (EHR) in Ontario and across Canada. Integrating patient information is a key part of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's (MOHLTC) strategy for improving wait times for key services, improving quality of care, and creating better health outcomes for all citizens.

3.0 What advantages does the EMPI offer?

The accurate identification of individuals, made possible by the EMPI, will improve the efficiency and accuracy of patient registration, save time, reduce duplicate testing, and enhance coordination of care.

4.0 Who uses the EMPI?

EMPI data is currently accessed by hospital users of the Wait Time Information System (WTIS), who use it to better manage and coordinate patients' treatment and care by determining if patients are on multiple wait lists for a particular procedure. Eventually, other clinical systems, such as radiology or pharmacy systems, will also use the EMPI to accurately identify patients.

5.0 Who administers the EMPI?

The EMPI is administered by the EMPI Operations Team based at eHealth Ontario. The EMPI Operations Team performs functions such as linking and unlinking patient records, identifying duplicate records from the same source information system, and maintaining the overall accuracy of data in the EMPI. Effective January 1, 2008, eHealth Ontario will oversee the operations of the EMPI on behalf, and under the authority, of the MOHLTC. The MOHLTC is defined as a "health information custodian" under the Ontario *Personal Health Information Protection Act, 2004* (PHIPA). eHealth Ontario is acting as the MOHLTC's "agent", also defined in PHIPA, to manage the EMPI.

6.0 What information is collected in the EMPI?

The EMPI only collects the minimum amount of information required to identify patients receiving health care services and treatment in Ontario. This includes such information as a patient's name, address, postal code, gender and birth date, and other identifiers such as a health card number and medical record numbers. The EMPI may also require additional information, such as next of kin, to help further identify patients where duplicate information exists. It is important to note, however, that the EMPI does not contain clinical information. Rather, the EMPI is used to help link patient records that contain clinical information, such as the WTIS.

7.0 Why does the EMPI collect an individual's personal health information?

The EMPI collects personal health information relating to individuals receiving health services in Ontario for the purpose of enabling health information custodians (e.g. hospitals) to accurately identify individuals across the health system. This occurs through the linking of patient identifying information relating to a unique individual.

8.0 Does the EMPI require a patient's entire medical record?

No. The EMPI only requires patient identifying information and identifiers, such as their health card number and medical record number. No clinical information, such as diagnosis or test results, is collected by or maintained in the EMPI.

9.0 For what purposes is information in the EMPI shared?

The information within the EMPI is shared with EMPI Operations Team members, the MOHLTC and participating Ontario hospitals to ensure consistent and accurate identification of patients receiving health care within the province. The EMPI Operations Team does not use information to contact patients for any reason.

10.0 Who has access to health information in the EMPI?

Access to information in the EMPI is limited to EMPI Operations Team members responsible for maintaining the accuracy of the information, authorized hospital staff and the MOHLTC staff using the EMPI to identify patients across multiple information systems.

11.0 How is information in the EMPI protected?

All personal health information collected in the EMPI is protected by Ontario's health privacy legislation, known as the *Personal Health Information Protection Act, 2004* (PHIPA). Specifically, administrative safeguards, such as data protection policies, govern the collection, use, and disclosure of patient information via the EMPI. EMPI Operations Team members are trained on these policies and sign detailed confidentiality agreements as a condition of their employment. The

EMPI also uses technical and physical safeguards to protect information against unauthorized access, use, disclosure, or modification. Examples of these safeguards include:

- All users must be registered and approved to access the EMPI;
- All users require unique usernames and passwords to log onto the EMPI;
- EMPI information is encrypted while in transit;
- The type and amount of information a user may access is controlled based on the privileges assigned to the user; and
- The EMPI is housed in a secure data centre with restricted access, video monitoring, and security guards.

12.0 Can I view my health information that resides within the EMPI?

Yes. You may request access to your personal health information in the EMPI by contacting the MOHLTC's Manager of the Access and Privacy Office (more information, including contact information, is available online at http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/legislation/bill_31/stat_info_practices.pdf) or the EMPI Privacy Lead at EMPIPrivacy@eHealthOntario.on.ca. However, information in the EMPI is limited to basic demographic information and health care identifiers. For access to clinical information, you must contact the privacy contact person at the hospital or health care organization where you received health care services and treatment.

13.0 Can I request a correction or amendment to my personal health information maintained in the EMPI?

Yes. You may request corrections or amendments to your information by contacting the physician at the hospital that submitted your personal health information to the EMPI. You may also contact the MOHLTC's Manager of the Access and Privacy Office to request corrections to your personal health information.

More information is available online at http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/legislation/bill_31/stat_info_practices.pdf.

14.0 Can I "lock" my information to prevent it from being added to the EMPI?

Under PHIPA, individuals may provide express instructions to health information custodians (e.g. hospitals) not to use or disclose their personal health information for health care purposes without consent; this is known as the "lock box" provision and usually applies to *clinical* information maintained in patients' medical records (e.g. diagnoses). However, certain provisions in PHIPA permit hospitals to disclose personal information where required by law for data organization and analysis without patient consent, as is the case for the EMPI. This means that you cannot "lock" your personal health information from being added to the EMPI.

15.0 Does the EMPI Operations Team ever sell patient information?

No. Both the MOHLTC and EMPI Operations Team are prohibited from selling patient information under Ontario's PHIPA.

16.0 How long is information kept in the EMPI?

The EMPI keeps historical versions of all patient identifiers to match them to a single patient. Since patient identification information spans a patient's entire health history, EMPI information is retained for at least the lifetime of the patient.

17.0 If I have questions about the handling of information in the EMPI Registry, who can I ask?

If you have questions or concerns about the EMPI's information handling practices, you may contact the:

- MOHLTC's Manager of the Access and Privacy Office in writing at 5700 Yonge St., 5th Floor, Toronto, Ontario, M2M 4K5; or
- EMPI Privacy Lead at: EMPIPrivacy@eHealthOntario.on.ca.

The EMPI Operations Team will work with the MOHLTC to answer questions and resolve privacy and security issues relating to the EMPI.