

Patient Retained Records

This month we have an article by Henbest, Germond and Fehrsen reporting on the use of patient retained records in primary health care in Lesotho. The findings are that it works well and that it is well accepted by all.

In South Africa, we have very little experience of comprehensive patient retained records. At best, fragments of a system are floating around in various places. We have the road-to-health cards, ante-natal cards, special clinic and "minor ailments" records of various kinds used differently from one place to another.

We will do well to look seriously at instituting a universally used comprehensive patient retained record for the country as we reconstruct the health care system towards one that is universally accessible and hopefully of higher quality.

The article argues for its effectiveness. It is eminently affordable. Not only is the cost of providing the booklet minimal but the system saves vast amounts of money on an ongoing basis. There is no storage space needed in expensive buildings. There is no need for a filing or retrieval clerk. It saves the patient an inordinate amount of time and thus also money as they no longer have to wait for their files. Multiplying these factors across all the hospital and primary care facilities of the country can effect a saving of many millions of rand per year.

South Africa needs a National Workshop to look at the feasibility of patient retained records being used universally. The system, its advantages and difficulties, needs to be debated so that we can come to a considered opinion about the universal use of patient retained records as a means of doing more for health with less resources

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Sam Fehrsen