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Consumer FAQs

Frequently Asked Questions

As a consumer of health care and a patient of doctors, hospitals, or other health care providers, you may have questions about the changing world of health care, electronic medical records, and the sharing of your health information. These Questions and Answers will help you understand and begin a conversation with your doctor about how SCHIEEx can help you.



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SCHIEEx CONSUMER FAQs

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WHAT IS AN ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORD (EHR)?

More and more doctors, hospitals, and other health care providers are using computers so they can record and keep their patient's health records electronically. This is called an Electronic Health Record, or EHR.

An electronic health record contains the same information as your paper health record and is stored by your doctor, much like a paper health record. Information contained in your health record may include:

- Basic information like your name, date of birth, address, phone number
- Medical history
- Medications
- Allergies
- Immunizations
- Lab and test results
- Medical problems or diagnoses
- Medical procedures
- Summaries of office or hospital visits

Why is an EHR important?

An EHR is better than a paper health record for many reasons.

- An EHR stores your medical history, saving you time when it comes to filling out forms about your medical history, allergies, medications, etc.
- An EHR can remind your doctor if you need any tests, procedures, or follow up care. An EHR can help your doctor's staff with scheduling your appointments.

- An EHR keeps track of what medicines you take and can check that the medicines you take now are not harmful when taken with other medicines.
- An EHR makes finding your information faster and easier for your doctor, saving both you and your doctor time.
- There is always a safe copy of your record if there is a fire or flood.
- An EHR cannot be lost or misfiled.
- An EHR system sets limits on who can see your health information and monitors who has seen your health information.

WHAT IS SCHIEEX?

In general, a health information exchange is a way for your doctors and other health care providers who use an EHR to share your health information electronically. Sharing health information through a health information exchange is faster and more convenient than sharing paper health records. There is no waiting on faxes, postal mail, or hand delivery. In order to share health information through a health information exchange, doctors, hospitals, and other health care providers must use an EHR, and be a member of a health information exchange.

SCHIEEx is South Carolina's Health Information Exchange and it connects doctors, hospitals, and other health care providers across the State. All SCHIEEx members use an EHR and have agreed, by contract, to follow certain rules, policies, and standards. SCHIEEx shares your electronic health information only with doctors and health care providers that are involved in your care, and when they need it to treat you.



SCHIEEx does not keep or store your health information. Your electronic health information is kept by your doctor, much like a paper health record. Any health information that is not stored in an EHR will continue to be shared by fax and regular mail as necessary to treat you.

Why is SCHIEEx important?

SCHIEEx shares your electronic health information with the right doctor at the right time so your doctor can make an informed decision and give you the best care possible. At the same time, SCHIEEx can save you, the patient, time and money and maybe even a few frustrations!

Tired of repeating your information and filling out the same forms over and over again? Do you sometimes forget things about your medical history?

It is easy to forget what medicines you have taken, what medicines you may be allergic to, when you had blood taken, or any other important health-related items.

Health information that is stored in an EHR at your doctor's office includes all of that information and more (see "What is an Electronic Health Record.") This information can get buried or lost in a paper record. Stored in an EHR, your doctor can see your health information at each of your appointments and share it, as necessary for your treatment, with other doctors or health care providers that are involved in your care.

Do you see more than one doctor?

Allowing your doctors to share your health information helps them to better coordinate your care. Each doctor will know which tests or services you have already received, so you can avoid repeated or unnecessary tests. Each doctor will know which medicines you

have been prescribed and avoid prescribing other medicines that may cause a bad reaction if they are taken together.

What happens if I have an emergency?

Sharing your health information through SCHIEEx can be life-saving in case of an emergency. By sharing your health information through SCHIEEx, an emergency room doctor would be able to see if you are allergic to any medicines, if you have a pacemaker or other medical device implanted, or any other important health information about you. This information may save your life if you are unable to talk to the emergency room doctors or nurses.

How can SCHIEEx save me time and money?

Your doctor can share blood work, tests, lab results, even X-rays results with new doctors or specialists who are treating you. Because you have agreed to share your health information through SCHIEEx, you may not have to repeat the blood work or other tests since the new doctors or specialists can see that information.

Health information that is shared through SCHIEEx can save you the hassle of rescheduling appointments or scheduling extra appointments because your test results were not faxed or the X-rays results did not come in the mail.

SCHIEEx is fast, reliable, and convenient.



WHY WOULD MY DOCTOR SHARE MY HEALTH INFORMATION THROUGH SCHIEEX?

There are only a few reasons a doctor, hospital, or other health care provider would share your health information through SCHIEEx.

1. *Treatment.*

Your doctor may share your health information with other doctors or health care providers to make sure you receive appropriate care.

2. *As Required by Law.*

There is a law in South Carolina that all doctors and hospitals must report certain injuries and diseases to the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC). This law helps DHEC control and prevent the spread of diseases. Examples of injuries and diseases that must be reported include dog bites (to help prevent the spread of rabies), food poisoning (to help find the source of the food making people sick), the flu, measles, mumps, Lyme disease, etc. For more information on reportable conditions, visit www.scdhec.gov.

3. *Improve Your Care.*

Doctors, hospitals, and other health care providers want to provide you with the best care possible. Your health information may be used or shared to evaluate the care you received. This will help doctors, hospitals, and other health care providers improve the quality of care they give to you and all of their other patients.

Doctors that use paper medical records already share your health information as needed for treatment, as required by law, and to improve your care. The only difference is that to share your health information on paper, your doctor may discuss it over the telephone,

or share it by fax, mailing it through the post office, Federal Express, or by hand delivering the paper records.

Allowing your doctor to share your electronic health information through SCHIEEx is more secure, private, and faster than sharing paper medical records.

WHO CAN SEE MY HEALTH INFORMATION THROUGH SCHIEEX?

'Authorized Users' that have a *treatment relationship with you* can see your health information. In other words, your doctor, dentist, pharmacist, certain members of their staff or other health care providers *with whom you have a treatment relationship* can see your personal health information.

However, just because a staff member can see your EHR does not mean that they can see *all* of your health information!

While your doctor and his or her nurse may see your medical history to treat you, the receptionist may see only your name and date of birth to schedule your appointments. This is called 'role-based access' and it limits how much of your health information a staff member can see depending on their job in your doctor's office.

Paper medical records can be seen or opened by any of the staff in a doctor's office. Not everyone can see your personal health information in an EHR, whether they are not allowed on the system or they are restricted to basic information.

Your doctor, hospital, or other health care provider can track who looks at your health information and when they looked at it. This helps them to be sure that only Authorized Users are looking at your personal health information for the right reasons.

Your privacy is protected much more so with an EHR than any paper records!



When will my doctors share health information through SCHIEEx?

Doctors, hospitals, and other health care providers can use SCHIEEx only if they have an EHR that has passed required tests and standards. Not every health care provider has switched from paper records to EHR. Some have made the switch already. Many are in the process of changing to an EHR, while others are determining which EHR is best for their practice.

As a member of SCHIEEx, your doctor, hospital, or other health care provider has signed legal contracts that require they follow all SCHIEEx policies and procedures. You must be notified by your doctor, hospital, or other health care provider in writing if they are a member of SCHIEEx.

When will my doctors share MY health information through SCHIEEx?

As stated before, in order to share health information through SCHIEEx, your doctor, hospital, or other health care provider must use an EHR that has passed required tests and standards, and they must also be a member of SCHIEEx.

In order for your doctor, hospital, or other health care provider to share YOUR health information through SCHIEEx, two things must happen:

1. Your doctor, hospital, or other health care provider must let you know that they are a member of SCHIEEx. The most common ways are to give you a Notice of Privacy Practices with the information or a SCHIEEx Notice of Participation.
2. You allow your doctor, hospital, or other health care provider to share your health information through SCHIEEx.

What do you mean by “other health care providers”?

Throughout these questions, you will see the phrase “your doctor or other health care providers” many times. The term *health care provider* includes doctors and hospitals and any licensed health care professional that provides treatment to you. *Other health care providers* include any other doctors or specialists you see for your health care, including but not limited to:

- Dentists
- Pharmacists
- Chiropractors
- Midwives

What do you mean by “informed decision”?

The more information your doctor, hospital, or other health care provider has about you, the more informed and knowledgeable they are about the type of care you need, what type and how much medicine you should be prescribed, and what, if any, tests or services you may need.

Allowing your doctors and other health care providers to share your health information helps them decide the best and safest way to treat you. Making a decision using all available information, such as your health information, is an “informed decision.”

WHAT IF I DO NOT WANT MY HEALTH INFORMATION SHARED THROUGH SCHIEEX?

Sharing your health information through SCHIEEx can improve the quality, safety and efficiency of your health care. However, it is *completely voluntary*.

You may choose to Opt Out of SCHIEEx. This means your health information will not be shared by SCHIEEx, your doctor or other health



care providers will not be able to use SCHIEEx to share your health information with other health care providers involved in your care. Your health information may still be shared, as necessary, through fax, mail, or hand delivery as normally used by your doctors.

Opting Out of SCHIEEx will not affect the treatment provided to you by your doctor, hospital, or other health care provider. All efforts will be made to provide you with the best possible care.

How do I “Opt Out”?

Each doctor or other health care provider who participates in SCHIEEx must tell you that they are a member of SCHIEEx. This information may be one part of their Notice of Privacy Practices or it may be a separate SCHIEEx Notice of Participation. Whatever Notice your doctor or other health care provider gives you, the Notice will tell you:

- Your doctor, hospital, or other health care provider is a member of SCHIEEx.
- How your electronic health information may be used or shared through SCHIEEx.
- How you can Opt Out and what to do if you change your mind ('Cancel the Opt Out').

Also on the Notice will be a place for you to check that you want to Opt Out and a place for you to sign and date the form. Once you Opt Out and give the form to your doctor, he or she will take the appropriate steps to make sure your electronic health information cannot be shared among any of your other doctors or health care providers.

Each time you receive a Notice of Privacy Practices or SCHIEEx Notice of Participation from your doctor, a hospital, or other health care provider, you must Opt Out as described above.

Remember, once you Opt Out, none of your electronic health information can be shared through SCHIEEx with any of your other health care providers.

Can I change my mind?

Yes. If you change your mind and decide to allow your doctors and other health care providers to share your information through SCHIEEx, you can ask them to Cancel your Opt Out.

To Cancel your Opt Out, ask your doctor or a member of his or her staff for the SCHIEEx form that allows you to do this. You will need to sign the form and submit it to your doctor or a member of his staff so they can take the appropriate steps to make your health information available to your other doctors or health care providers.

Once you change your mind and cancel your Opt Out, your health care providers can share your electronic health information with other health care providers using SCHIEEx, including information about the care you received during the period of time you were Opted Out.

WILL MY HEALTH INFORMATION BE SAFE?

There are Federal and State laws that doctors, hospitals, and other health care providers must follow to keep your information private and secure. The two Federal laws listed below require every health care provider to follow specific rules and standards regarding privacy and security to keep your information safe.

*The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996
(HIPAA)*



HIPAA protects your privacy and your health information stored by your health care providers, whether in paper format or electronic format. This law requires that your health care provider give you a Notice of Privacy Practices. The Notice will tell you how your health information can be used or shared and what rights you, the patient, have when it comes to your health information. Even if your health care provider is not a member of SCHIEEx, your provider must give you the Notice of Privacy Practices.

Always read the Notice of Privacy Practices carefully.

The Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health Act (HITECH) of 2009

HITECH provides additional rules and security to protect your health information when it is in an electronic format (EHR).

If your doctor, hospital, or other health care provider is a member of SCHIEEx, it may be listed in the Notice of Privacy Practices under how your health information may be used or shared. If SCHIEEx is not listed in the Notice of Privacy Practices, your doctor is required to inform you in another manner, either through a one-on-one discussion or a SCHIEEx Notice of Participation.

SCHIEEx meets or exceeds the national standards for the security of electronic Health Information Exchange. Details about these security safeguards and how SCHIEEx is governed can be found in the SCHIEEx Operational Plan located at www.schiex.org

SCHIEEx is also required to meet or exceed any new standards developed for electronic Health Information Exchange, and is working closely with the Office of the National Coordinator (ONC) to ensure and verify these standards are met.

SUMMARY POINTS

- SCHIEEx is a way for your doctors and other health care providers to share your health information; it does not store or keep your health information.
- Allowing your health information to be shared through SCHIEEx is *completely voluntary*. You may Opt Out at any time.
- Your health information can be shared through SCHIEEx only with doctors, hospitals, or other health care providers that have an *established, treatment relationship with you or are involved in your care*.
- Your health information can be shared through SCHIEEx only for treatment purposes, as required by law, or for improving the quality of care you receive.
- Only Authorized Users can use or share your health information through SCHIEEx.

WHAT IF I HAVE MORE QUESTIONS?

If you have any questions, please talk with your doctor or health care provider. They want you to have the information you need to make an educated choice about the way information from your electronic health record is shared with other health care providers.

You can also **contact us** for more information.



EXAMPLES

SCHIEEx on Vacation

In March, a mother takes her child, Sam, to their primary care doctor in Columbia who prescribes a drug to treat Sam's throat infection. When Sam develops a rash over the weekend and the doctor's office is closed, the mother takes him to the local urgent care center. It turns out that Sam was allergic to the drug, so it is stopped and a new drug is prescribed.

In July, while visiting her grandparents who live in Myrtle Beach, Sam gets a nasty, deep cut on her foot from a piece of metal. Sam is taken to the local emergency room where the doctor stitches up her foot. Sam's mother cannot remember when Sam last had a tetanus shot.

If Sam's primary care doctor, the urgent care center, and the emergency room doctor in Myrtle Beach all use an EHR and are all members of **SCHIEEx**, the emergency room doctor would quickly be able to see what drugs Sam is allergic to and the exact date of her last tetanus shot.

With Sam's medical history right there in front of him, Sam's doctor can make a more informed decision about what drug to prescribe to prevent the cut on Sam's foot from becoming infected.

SCHIEEx in an Emergency

John is an 82 year old man who lives alone. John has a history of high blood pressure, heart disease and diabetes. John must take several medicines and is allergic to three other different medicines.

John develops a urinary tract infection and quickly becomes dehydrated and very weak.

A neighbor calls 911 and John is transported by ambulance to the hospital. His daughter, who is his closest family member and emergency contact, lives in Florida and cannot be reached.

If John's primary care doctor and the hospital both use an EHR and are members of **SCHIEEx**, the hospital doctor can quickly see who John's primary care doctor is, a history of John's medical problems, his recent procedures or test results, the names of the medicines he takes, and to which medicines he is allergic.

With all of John's medical history before them, John's doctors can make more informed decisions about how to treat John's urinary tract infection and other medical issues.

SCHIEEx and the Cancer Patient

Diane is a female in her mid-50's who discovers a lump in her breast during a self-exam. She immediately makes an appointment with her primary care doctor where she is given the Notice that her doctor is a member of SCHIEEx. Diane talks to her doctor about SCHIEEx and decides that she would like her information shared with her other doctors and health care providers.

Diane's primary care doctor orders Diane to get blood work and schedules her for a mammogram at the local women's health clinic. When Diane arrives at the clinic for her mammogram, she is given a Notice that the clinic is a member of SCHIEEx. Diane already knows about SCHIEEx and allows the women's health clinic to share the health information made



available by her primary care doctor: her list of medicines and allergies and the size and location of the lump in her left breast.

After the mammogram, Diane goes back to her primary doctor for a follow-up. The lab sends the results of the blood work and the women's health clinic shares the results of the mammogram with the primary care doctor through SCHIEEx immediately; the actual mammogram pictures are sent by a courier. Diane's primary care doctor, concerned the lumps are cancerous, then refers Diane to an oncologist.

At the oncologist's office, Diane is given a Notice that the medical practice is a member of SCHIEEx. Diane understands the benefits of sharing her health information through SCHIEEx. The oncologist looks up the health information shared by Diane's primary care doctor and the women's health clinic, including the results of the blood work and mammogram. Diane doesn't have to go through those tests again. Diane is diagnosed with breast cancer and must undergo a mastectomy.

Diane is admitted to the hospital, given a Notice that the hospital is a member of SCHIEEx. This is fine with Diane. Seeing Diane's medical history through SCHIEEx, the surgeon can see that she is allergic to a certain type of anesthesia so he makes sure that a safer drug is used during surgery. Diane's surgery is successful.

As Diane goes through treatment, all of her doctors, surgeons, and other health care providers can monitor what tests she has taken, the results of those tests, and her progress as she gets better. Diane doesn't have to remember at each appointment what another doctor ordered or what medication was

prescribed. SCHIEEx shares that information among her health care providers, as it is needed.

Note: Each time Diane visited a new health care provider (women's health clinic, hospital, oncologist, surgeon's office, etc.) she was given a Notice that the provider is a member of SCHIEEx and an opportunity to Opt Out.

Opting Out of SCHIEEx... With a Change of Mind Later

Karen is a 26 year old female and visits three different doctors or health care providers: 1) her primary care physician, 2) a women's health clinic and 3) an eye doctor. All three of her health care providers have an EHR and participate in SCHIEEx.

Karen had recent visits with her eye doctor and the nurse practitioner at the women's health clinic. Karen received a Notice from both the eye doctor and the women's health clinic stating that each provider is a member of SCHIEEx. Both Notices gave Karen information about SCHIEEx, including the opportunity to Opt Out. Karen did not Opt Out during those visits.

Weeks later, Karen has a routine visit with her primary care doctor. Karen is given the Notice that says her primary care doctor is a member of SCHIEEx. As Karen waits for her appointment, she decides that she wants to Opt Out of SCHIEEx so she checks 'Opt Out' on the Notice, signs it and gives it to her primary care doctor.

Because Karen chose to Opt Out, her primary care physician, optometrist, and women's health clinic nurse practitioner will no longer be able to share information from her EHR with one another through SCHIEEx.



Fast forward six months...

Karen is having stomach pains and visits her primary care doctor who performs several tests. Her pain gets worse over the next few days and Karen ends up in the emergency department on a Sunday night.

Karen is given the hospital's Notice that says the hospital is a member of SCHIEEx.

As she reads through the Notice, Karen realizes that she wants the emergency room doctor to know about the tests and care she received from her primary care doctor earlier in the week. Then she can avoid paying for tests that she has already had or may not need, and possibly avoid delays in her treatment.

Karen changes her mind about her decision to Opt Out. She decides to allow her doctors and other health care providers to share her health information through SCHIEEx so they can make informed decisions about her course of treatment and they can better coordinate her health care.

Before the emergency doctor can see her information through SCHIEEx, Karen must cancel her Opt Out by completing and signing a form given to her by the hospital. Once Karen cancels her Opt Out, the hospital emergency room doctor, primary care doctor, eye doctor, and the women's health clinic nurse practitioner can share Karen's health information with one another through SCHIEEx, including health information that was obtained during the period of time she had opted out.

It is important to know that if Karen had been unconscious or too sick to tell the hospital that she wanted to change her mind and cancel the Opt Out, her emergency room doctor would not have been able to use her information through SCHIEEx. This

means important, even life-saving health information may not be available to your doctors in times of serious emergencies. Allowing your doctors to make more informed decisions about your treatment in an emergency can mean a better outcome for you.

