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## **Surgeon General's New Family Health History Tool Is Released, Ready for "21<sup>st</sup> Century Medicine"**

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services today released an updated and improved version of the Surgeon General's Internet-based family health history tool. The new tool makes it easier for consumers to assemble and share family health history information. It can also help practitioners make better use of health history information so they can provide more informed and personalized care for their patients.

"This valuable tool can put family histories to work to improve patient well-being and the quality of care," HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt said. "The tool is built on health information technology standards that make it more convenient for consumers and more useful for practitioners. It is ready for use in electronic health records. And its software code will be openly available to other health organizations, so they can customize and build on its standards base."

"Family history has always been an important part of good health care, but it has been underused," said Acting Surgeon General Steven Galson, a rear admiral in the U.S. Public Health Service. "Today, with our growing knowledge of genetics, family history is becoming even more important. The new tool will help consumers and clinicians alike. It will also serve as a platform for developing new risk assessment software that will help in screening and prevention of cancer, heart disease, diabetes, and other conditions."

Key features of the new version of the Surgeon General's My Family Health Portrait include:

- Convenience – Consumers can access the tool easily on the Web. Completing the family health history profile typically takes 15-20 minutes. Consumers should not have to keep filling out different health history forms for different practitioners. Information is easily updated or amended.
- Consumer control and privacy – The family health history tool gives consumers access to software that builds a family health tree. But the personal information entered during the use of the tool is not kept by a government or other site. Consumers download their information to their own computer. From there, they have control over how the information is used.
- Sharing – Because the information is in electronic form, it can be easily shared with relatives or with practitioners. Relatives can add to the information, and a special re-indexing feature helps relatives easily start their own history based on data in a history they received. Practitioners can help consumers understand and use their information.

- EHR-ready, Decision support-ready – Because the new tool is based on commonly used standards, the information it generates is ready for use in electronic health records and personal health records. It can be used in developing clinical decision software, which helps the practitioner understand and make the most use of family health information.
- Personalization of care – Family history information can help alert practitioners and patients to patient-specific susceptibilities.
- Downloadable, customizable – The code for the new tool is openly available for others to adopt. Health organizations are invited to download and customize, using the tool under their own brand and adding features that serve their needs. Developers may also use the code to create new risk assessment software tools.

The first adopter of the HHS-developed tool is the National Institute of Genomic Medicine of Mexico (INMEGEN). Dr. Gerardo Jimenez-Sanchez, director general of the institute, will release the Mexican Spanish-language version of the tool in Mexico City this month. The Mexican family health history tool will be available on the INMEGEN Web site, <http://www.inmegen.gob.mx>.

The Indian Health Service, an agency of HHS that was instrumental in developing the new Surgeon General tool, will also adopt it into the IHS care system.

One organization saying it will link to the new tool is the Lance Armstrong Foundation (LAF), a cancer advocacy organization. “A strong family health history tool can be an important element for guiding medical decision-making, especially in the area of cancer screening, prevention and early detection,” said LAF founder and chairman Lance Armstrong. “This tool will further the capabilities of electronic health records and takes a significant step toward improving clinical care.”

The Surgeon General’s My Family Health Portrait was originally launched in 2004, but the first version was not standards-based. The new tool was developed under Secretary Leavitt’s Initiative on Personalized Health Care. It will be hosted by the National Cancer Institute, where the caBIG® initiative is pioneering health IT networks and software sharing. A ready process for organizations to download the family health history code is at <https://gforge.nci.nih.gov/projects/fhh>.

The Surgeon General’s new My Family Health Portrait tool is located at <https://familyhistory.hhs.gov>. In addition, a presentation of sample risk assessment tools under development can be viewed at <http://videocast.nih.gov/summary.asp?live=7297>.

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Note: All HHS press releases, fact sheets and other press materials are available at <http://www.hhs.gov/news>.