

Information Feudalism: How legacy information systems kill people in the healthcare system

Unfortunately, every day in the current health care system in Canada, health care professionals must treat patients while lacking critical information needed to provide them with optimal care.¹ Here is an example from a recent patient encounter. The names of the individuals, and the colours of the pills involved have been changed to protect the innocent.

“Mrs. Smith, the reason you’ve been feeling so rotten is because you have a pneumonia in your right lung. We’d really like to start treatment right away, but you told the nurse you had a serious reaction to an antibiotic before. Do you remember which one?”

Mrs. Smith replied “The Pink one.” Sensing that this was not particularly helpful she shot back “It’s all written down on my medical record – can’t you just look it up?”

Indeed, Mrs. Smith’s assertion seem reasonable enough. If the internet guarantee’s that I find out about a toddler smoking in a small village in the Philippines, surely it is not unreasonable to think that I should be able to find out about a significant adverse event that occurred at another institution within a single-payer, publicly funded healthcare system.

What Mrs. Smith doesn’t know is that not only is it difficult to get that information from across town, I often can’t get critical information like that from down the hall in my own hospital. Something is rotten in the state of healthcare information systems.

1. Stiell A, Forster AJ, Stiell IG, van Walraven C. Prevalence of information gaps in the emergency department and the effect on patient outcomes. *Cmaj*. Nov 11 2003;169(10):1023-1028.