The use of computer and information technology to support an electronic health record (EHR) is quickly becoming a standard practice in health care. For nurses and other health-care team members, the use of computer technology provides quick access to important information about your health or illness. For you, it means no longer having to repeat your health information multiple times as you receive care and the assurance that members of your health-care team have ready access to current health information. This fact sheet answers questions you may have about the use of computers and other computer technology by nurses.

How do nurses use computers in their daily work?
Nurses use computers to:

• Record on the electronic health record your personal health-care story, the treatments they carry out for you, and your response and progress toward your health care goal for monitoring and for ready access by other team members.
• Obtain information about your past and ongoing treatments and medications and the results to ensure the best care is provided.
• Review data about your current and past health situation and plan of care on the electronic health record, which helps them monitor your recovery process over time.
• Access clinical knowledge such as drug information, nursing assessments, articles and nursing best practice guidelines and resources to better understand your health situation and plan of care.

What types of computers and information technology do nurses use?
• Nurses use computers similar to those that you use at home or at work. They use software programs specifically designed to support the work of nurses and other health-care team members.
• Nurses may also use a small hand held computer known as Personal Digital Assistants or PDAs. PDAs are very similar to the Blackberry or iPhone that you or your family and friends may use at home or work.

How do nurses use computers when they are busy with patients/clients?
• Health-care organizations may have a variety of computer devices in use –some are located at the reception desk or nursing station; others may be on carts or mounted on the walls throughout the organization.
• Mobile computers work from a wireless system which enables them to retrieve and store information remotely from the main computer.
• A mobile or handheld computer allows nurses to access your chart or record, view information, and make notes about your care from anywhere in their place of work.

Is my personal and health information private and confidential on a computer?
• Yes! Health-care organizations and health-care workers must follow very strict rules and regulations to ensure the computer system is safe and secure and that only those individuals with permission to view your health information have access to your record. Various users are authorized through secure passwords to access only those areas of your information they require to do their work.
How do computers and related information technology help nurses provide quality care?
• Computers enable nurses to quickly access important information about your health or illness and your treatment plan from your electronic health record.
• Nurses can access information such as your laboratory test and x-ray results and health reports from other health-care team members to give you the best care possible.
• Nurses can record your health information, treatments and progress for ready access and use by other health team members.
• Nurses may use the computer to search drug databases, libraries and best practice resources to obtain important information related to your diagnosis and care or find health education information for you.

What kind of information do nurses enter on the computer?
• Nurses enter the same type of health-care information and observations that were previously written in the paper chart including nursing treatments and the results.
• Nurses may enter details such as your blood pressure, temperature, effects of medication and treatments, and notes about how you are feeling to ensure the health-care team has your complete information.
• Nurses will also note your personal preferences on your health-care plan that all team members use to make informed decisions about your care and treatment.

Do all nurses and other members of the health-care team use the computer?
• In some organizations, there is widespread use of computers as an important tool for all members of the health-care team. In other organizations, computers are just being introduced.
• The use of computers for health-care organizations is increasing rapidly to support the use of an electronic health record and other related technological innovations.

Can I use the computer in my own self-care?
• Yes, there are many health-care web sites readily available to the public. However, some are more useful and accurate than others.
• There are a number of ways to assess the credibility of web sites, and knowing the source of the information and when it was made available are very important.
• Information from government, educational institutions, professional associations and health condition related organizations are usually reliable sources of health information. Some health-care organizations and governments have patient portals which are very informative and useful.
• Beware of commercial sources of data as they may be marketing a product or service.
• It is best to ask your nurse or other health-care provider for advice related to use of the internet based health information in your care. They can help you assess its quality and interpret it in relation to your health situation.

Computer systems in health care increase the quality, safety, and consistency of patient care by providing nurses with quick and easy access to clinical information related to your health. These systems provide information and resources on best clinical practice and are a tool to quickly enter and share observations and information with all members of the health-care team.