

# **Preparing for Online Communication with Your Patients**

**A Guide for Providers**



This easy-to-use, time-saving guide is designed to help medical practices and community clinics prepare for communicating with patients through an electronic health record portal, personal health record, mobile app, or other electronic means. It will help you collect and organize the information you need to create an effective plan for online patient communication. The guide will work best when everyone on your team collaborates to fill out the worksheets, carefully considering practice processes and issues. In this way everyone will understand the importance of patient communication to the overall success of your practice. This publication was made possible by Grant Number 90HT0029 from the Office of the National Coordinator for HIT.

### **Planning and Communication Tools**

- A checklist of meaningful use and Patient-Centered Medical Home requirements that can be fulfilled by electronically communicating with patients.
- A worksheet template to help assign and coordinate roles and tasks involved in planning and managing electronic patient communication.
- A planning tool to help identify patients' special needs that the practice must address to facilitate online communication.
- A template letter that can be customized and given to patients to explain about the practice's electronic communication services and what patients need to do to participate.
- A list of online resources for more in-depth information on issues related to electronic patient communication and health information exchange technologies.
- A general brochure that can be printed and given to patients explaining "What You Need to Know About Communicating Electronically With Your Healthcare Providers."
- A short animated video for consumers explaining the benefits of communicating online with health providers. The link can be emailed or you can download it and show it in your waiting room.

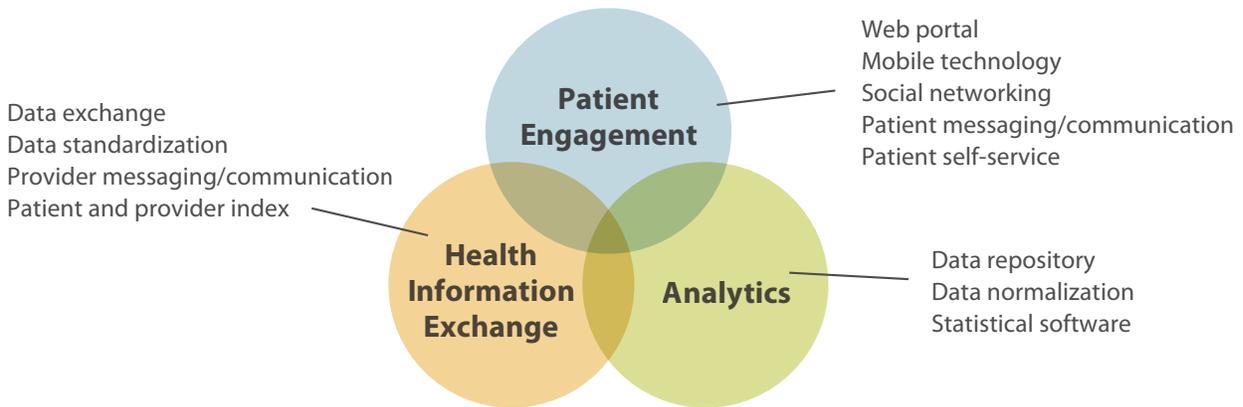


## Communicating With Your Patients in the New World of Value-Based Reimbursement

Implementing information technology can be daunting. Like many healthcare providers, you may simultaneously be working toward integrating an electronic health record (EHR) into your practice to achieve the benchmarks of meaningful use, certifying as a Patient-Centered Medical Home (PCMH), and positioning yourself to participate in an Accountable Care Organization (ACO).

The good news is that once implemented, EHRs and health information exchange (HIE) deliver enormous benefits. By improving access to vital information, patients, caregivers, and clinicians can collaborate effectively. Health information technology generates better data for analytics, supports automated identification and management of high-risk patients, and enables tracking of quality and patient outcomes, which are all requirements for value-based reimbursement.

### Critical IT Capabilities for New Models of Care



Patients who use health information technologies, such as portals, personal health records, mobile apps, and secure messaging may be more efficient users of healthcare resources, better managers of their health behaviors, and feel more satisfied with the healthcare system.

By helping your patients become comfortable with the new communication tools you are offering — and preparing your staff to take full advantage of these new resources — you will assure patients better health and healthcare.



## Planning Guide

The following is an easy-to-use, time-saving guide to help you collect and organize the information you need to create an effective plan for online patient communication. Tools provided are:

1. A checklist of meaningful use and Patient-Centered Medical Home requirements that can be fulfilled by electronically communicating with patients.
2. A worksheet template to help assign and coordinate roles and tasks involved in planning and managing electronic patient communication. You can copy the worksheet “as is” or use it as a guide to develop your own.
3. A planning tool to help identify patients’ special needs that the practice must address to facilitate online communication. Use it “as is” or as a guide in developing your own list.

The guide will work best when you have as many people from your practice team as possible work together to fill out the worksheets. Involving physicians, nurses, and support staff will ensure that you have thoroughly thought through processes and issues, and it will help the team understand the importance of patient communication to the overall success of your practice.



## 1: Health Information Technology Requirements Checklist

The requirements for electronic communication with patients for both Meaningful Use Stage 1/ Stage 2 and PCMH are remarkably similar, which is by design. The table below summarizes the requirements for each program. Place a check mark to indicate the type of technology you will use to fulfill each requirement. There are additional features you may want to consider for enhancing electronic communication with patients provided at the end of the table.

**EHR** = Electronic Health Record, **PHR** = Personal Health Record, **Mobile App** = Mobile Application

Requirements that can be fulfilled by electronic communication with patients		How we will meet this requirement			
Meaningful Use Stage 1/Stage 2 Requirements	Patient-Centered Medical Home Requirements by Criterion	Portal to EHR	PHR	Mobile App	Other Technology
<b>Access During Office Hours</b>					
	Providing timely clinical advice by secure electronic messages during office hours.				
<b>After-Hour Access</b>					
	Providing timely clinical advice using a secure, interactive electronic system when the office is not open.				
<b>Electronic Access</b>					
Stage 1: Provide patients with an electronic copy of their health information upon request. More than 50% of all patients who request an electronic copy of their health information are provided it within 3 business days. (Core)	More than 50% of patients who request an electronic copy of their health information receive it within 3 business days. May include the following types of information:				



Requirements that can be fulfilled by electronic communication with patients		How we will meet this requirement			
Meaningful Use Stage 1/Stage 2 Requirements	Patient-Centered Medical Home Requirements by Criterion	Portal to EHR	PHR	Mobile App	Other Technology
Problem List	Problem List				
Diagnoses	Diagnoses				
Test results, e.g. labs	Test results, e.g. labs				
Medication lists	Medication lists				
Allergies	Allergies				
Immunizations	Immunizations				
<p>Stage 1: Provide patients with timely electronic access to health information within 4 business days of information being available to the EP. At least 10% of patients are provided access subject to the EP's discretion to withhold certain information. (Menu)</p> <p>Stage 2: Provide online access to health information for more than 50% with more than 5% actually accessing. (Core)</p>	At least 10% of patients have electronic access to their current health information within 4 business days of when the information is available to the practice.				
Stage 2: Provide clinical summaries (e.g. discharge summary, visit summary) for patients for each office visit. Clinical summaries provided to patients for more than 50% of all office visits within 3 business days. (Core)	Clinical summaries (e.g. discharge summary, visit summary) are provided to patients for more than 50% of office visits within three business days.				
Stage 2: More than 5% of patients send secure messages to their EP and access their information electronically.	Two-way communication between patients/families and the practice, e.g. secure messaging.				
	Request for appointments				
	Prescription refills				
	Request for referrals or test results				



Requirements that can be fulfilled by electronic communication with patients		How we will meet this requirement			
Meaningful Use Stage 1/Stage 2 Requirements	Patient-Centered Medical Home Requirements by Criterion	Portal to EHR	PHR	Mobile App	Other Technology
<b>Medical Home Responsibilities</b>					
Stage 1: Use certified EHR to identify patient-specific education resources and provide those resources to the patient if appropriate. More than 10% of all unique patients seen by the EP are provided patient-specific education resources. (Menu)	The care team gives the patient/family access to evidence-based care and self-management support.				
Stage 1: Send reminders to patients per patient preference for preventive/follow-up care. More than 20% of all patients 65 years or older or 5 years old or younger were sent an appropriate reminder during the EHR reporting period. (Menu)					

Additional features to consider that are not required of MU or PCMH	Portal to EHR	PHR	Mobile App	Other Technology
Consulting on symptoms				
Follow up reminders				
Benefits and coverage				
Update contact information				
Payments				
Online form completion				
Educational material				
Access by family and/or caregivers				
Access by other treating providers				
Health Information Exchange (HIE) consent				



## 2. Patient Communication Roles and Tasks

A number of activities need to occur for a successful rollout of electronic communications with patients. A project plan detailing the task and person(s) responsible for completing each task is critical. Use this worksheet as a guide or “as is” to plan your project. It provides space to assign individuals to tasks, list related details to manage, and make notes on how you plan to train or prepare staff.

Role or Task	Related Details	Responsible Person(s)	Action Plan	Due Date
<b>Communication Planning</b>				
<b>Patient communication and coordination leader/champion</b>	Oversight of patient communication efforts.			
<b>Roll-out plan</b>	Should enrollment be open to all patients or to a select group, such as those motivated for a healthy lifestyle, experienced technology uses, or a disease group?			
<b>Pilot launch</b>	Do you plan to roll-out the program at one location or with an individual or group of providers' patients before rolling out to the entire practice? Or will all locations roll-out at the same time?			



Role or Task	Related Details	Responsible Person(s)	Action Plan	Due Date
<b>Patient education and outreach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Letter (see template)</li><li>• Patient brochure on electronic communication (see attached)</li><li>• Poster</li><li>• Email outreach</li><li>• Staff talking points</li><li>• Participation incentives</li><li>• Hands-on training or workshops</li><li>• Enrollment follow-up plan</li></ul>			
<b>Website updates</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Enrollment information</li><li>• Privacy and security information</li><li>• Patient brochure on electronic communication (see attached)</li><li>• Patient testimonials</li></ul>			
<b>Staff training</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Decide on training sequence</li><li>• Train-the-trainer Topics:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Portal/PHR/mobile apps &amp; features</li><li>• New workflow procedures</li><li>• Patient support, trouble shooting</li><li>• Cultural competence</li></ul></li></ul>			



Role or Task	Related Details	Responsible Person(s)	Action Plan	Due Date
<b>Communication Implementation</b>				
<b>Enrollment/ registration plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Steps for enrollment</li> <li>• Follow-up to assure completion of process</li> <li>• Language or other accessibility issues</li> </ul>			
<b>Responding to patient emails</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who responds?</li> <li>• Time to respond?</li> <li>• Other workflow impact?</li> </ul>			
<b>ePrescribing guidelines</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Routine refills</li> <li>• Urgent refills</li> <li>• Special needs/ instructions</li> </ul>			
<b>Appointment management and response</b>	<p>Protocols for assuring response to electronic patient requests</p>			
<b>Emergency or urgent care information, guidance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy</li> <li>• Phone numbers</li> <li>• Directions</li> <li>• Visibility of emergency contact info at all key online points</li> </ul>			



Role or Task	Related Details	Responsible Person(s)	Action Plan	Due Date
<b>Personal health information or data requests</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• MU requirements</li><li>• PCMH requirements</li></ul>			
<b>Health information exchange consent (opt-in, opt-out)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Forms</li><li>• Process for explaining</li><li>• Compliance with HIE policies</li></ul>			
<b>Technical support, Help Desk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Regular hours</li><li>• Off hours</li></ul>			
<b>Feedback &amp; Improvement</b>				
<b>Capture patient feedback on use of technology and suggestions for improvement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Online survey</li><li>• Onsite survey</li><li>• Informal dinner focus group</li><li>• Trusted key "informants"</li><li>• Clinics, group classes, and other existing patient forums</li></ul>			



### 3. Special Communication Needs

Your patient population may have unique needs and circumstances. Here are some for which you might need to prepare.

Special Needs	Related Details	Responsible Person(s)	Action Plan	Due Date
<b>Cultural and linguistic competence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Translation services information</li> <li>• Privacy or communication policies</li> <li>• Culturally appropriate materials</li> </ul>			
<b>Health language literacy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guide to understanding lab results, care summaries, etc.</li> </ul>			
<b>Access for people with disabilities</b>				
<b>Care summaries in plain language</b>				



Special Needs	Related Details	Responsible Person(s)	Action Plan	Due Date
<b>Computer and online skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Training opportunities for patients</li><li>• Support services</li></ul>			
<b>Internet access alternatives</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No access</li><li>• Limited access</li></ul>				
<b>Financial needs</b>				
<b>Special privacy/confidentiality concerns</b>				
<b>Access for minors</b>	Policies and procedures on minors turning 18			



## Sample Letter Introducing Electronic Communication to Patients

### Organizational Letterhead

Dear Patient Name,

Name of practice/provider has recently implemented a type of communication platform(s).

Just as you use technology in many other areas of your life – banking, shopping, communicating with friends and family – healthcare is rapidly becoming an area in which you can safely and securely communicate online with your healthcare providers. The new tools will help you better manage your health and healthcare.

### These are the new services now available to you:

- List here (secure messaging, lab results, prescription refills, care summaries, health information, appointment requests, etc.)

### To use platform you will need:

- List devices (computer, tablet, or smart phone, etc.)
- A high-speed Internet connection
- A login name and password

If you do not have the proper devices or connection, please contact name and number.

Optional: Who to call if a patient needs help learning to go online or has a disability.

*continued on next page*



**To enroll in the platform, you will need to take the following steps:**

- 1.
- 2.
3. etc.

If you have a special need to make online communication easier, please let us know so we can help make arrangements, if possible.

The platform is available in languages.

When using platform, your health information will always be secure and never available to anyone other than those on your healthcare team. For additional information on the safety and security of health information visit [www.oag.ca.gov/privacy/facts/medical-privacy/patient-rights](http://www.oag.ca.gov/privacy/facts/medical-privacy/patient-rights).

If you have any technical difficulties enrolling or using platform, please call number during normal working hours: days, hours. After hours, on weekends or holidays please call: number.

Do not hesitate to call or email us if you have any questions about using the platform.

Sincerely,

Personal Provider Name



## Provider Resources for Electronic Patient Communication

### Patient Materials

#### Patient Brochure

- A general patient brochure is included with this guide that can be printed and given to patients at the time of their visit to explain “What You Need to Know About Communicating Electronically With Your Healthcare Providers.” You can also put it on your website if you have one or send it as a link with the letter announcing your new online service.

#### Short Animated Video

- A short animated video is available for consumers explaining the benefits of communicating online with health providers. The link can be emailed or you can download it and show it in your waiting room.  
[www.ohii.ca.gov/calohi/eHealth/MakingHIEHappen/ThePatientBetterCareThroughTechnology.aspx](http://www.ohii.ca.gov/calohi/eHealth/MakingHIEHappen/ThePatientBetterCareThroughTechnology.aspx)

#### Patient Resources

- Information about electronic health information tailored for patients and families is available from the Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT including videos, fact sheets, personal stories, and other materials.  
[www.healthit.gov/patients-families](http://www.healthit.gov/patients-families)

### Meaningful Use, Patient-Centered Medical Home and General Health Information Technology Resources

#### The National Learning Consortium (NLC)

- “The NLC represents a collective body of knowledge and resources designed to support health care providers and Health IT professionals working towards the implementation, adoption, and meaningful use of certified EHR systems.”  
[www.healthit.gov/providers-professionals/national-learning-consortium](http://www.healthit.gov/providers-professionals/national-learning-consortium)

#### Patient-Specific Education Resources for Achieving Meaningful Use Stage 2

- HealthIT.Gov (ONC) resource for providers implementing EHRs and achieving meaningful use.  
[www.healthit.gov/providers-professionals/achieve-meaningful-use/core-measures-2/patient-specific-education-resources](http://www.healthit.gov/providers-professionals/achieve-meaningful-use/core-measures-2/patient-specific-education-resources)



## Meaningful Use, Patient-Centered Medical Home and General Health Information Technology Resources (continued)

### The Medicare and Medicaid Electronic Health Record (EHR) Incentive Programs: Stage 2 Toolkit

- “This Stage 2 Toolkit is an interactive document that provides users with resources and information about Stage 2 of the EHR Incentive Programs and 2014 Clinical Quality Measure requirements. The toolkit includes materials for eligible professionals, eligible hospitals, and critical access hospitals.”

[www.cms.gov/Regulations-and-Guidance/Legislation/EHRIncentivePrograms/Downloads/Stage2\\_Toolkit\\_EHR\\_0313.pdf](http://www.cms.gov/Regulations-and-Guidance/Legislation/EHRIncentivePrograms/Downloads/Stage2_Toolkit_EHR_0313.pdf)

### Patient-Centered Medical Home Resource Center

- AHRQ full resource center.

[www.pcmh.ahrq.gov/](http://www.pcmh.ahrq.gov/)

### NCQA’s Patient-Centered Medical Home (PCMH) 2011 and CMS Stage 1 Meaningful Use Requirements

- [www.ncqa.org/Portals/0/Public%20Policy/NCQA\\_PCMH\\_2011\\_Meaningful\\_Use\\_Crosswalk\\_11.21.2011.pdf](http://www.ncqa.org/Portals/0/Public%20Policy/NCQA_PCMH_2011_Meaningful_Use_Crosswalk_11.21.2011.pdf)

## Personal Health Record Education

### Personal Health Records and Patient Portals

- HIMSS resource library on PHRs

[www.himss.org/resourcelibrary/TopicList.aspx?MetaDataID=1498&navItemNumber=17844](http://www.himss.org/resourcelibrary/TopicList.aspx?MetaDataID=1498&navItemNumber=17844)

### My PHR

- Information/tools/resources for consumers on PHRs from the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA).

[www.myphr.com](http://www.myphr.com)

## Patient Engagement

### Patient Engagement Toolkit

- HIMSS resource page and toolkit for engaging patients in eHealth.

[www.himss.org/library/patient-engagement-toolkit](http://www.himss.org/library/patient-engagement-toolkit)

### The Patient Engagement Framework

- National eHealth Collaborative resource: “The Patient Engagement Framework is a model created to guide healthcare organizations in developing and strengthening their patient engagement strategies through the use of eHealth tools and resources.”

[www.nationalehealth.org/patient-engagement-framework](http://www.nationalehealth.org/patient-engagement-framework)



## Patient Engagement (continued)

### Consumer eHealth Readiness Tool

- National eHealth Collaborative resource for purchase that is mapped onto the above Patient Engagement Framework. It serves as an online business intelligence tool and support service.

[www.nationalehealth.org/cert](http://www.nationalehealth.org/cert)

## Privacy and Security

### eHealth Privacy 360

- CalOHII resource website on privacy and security in eHealth. Contains sections for providers and consumers, and includes links to further privacy and security key resources.

[www.ohii.ca.gov/privacy360/](http://www.ohii.ca.gov/privacy360/)

### State of California Office of the Attorney General

- Brochures for consumers on their patient rights to medical privacy and help deciding whether to use a personal health record.

[www.oag.ca.gov/privacy/medical-privacy](http://www.oag.ca.gov/privacy/medical-privacy)

## Health Information Exchange Technology

### Health Information Exchange, Resource Library

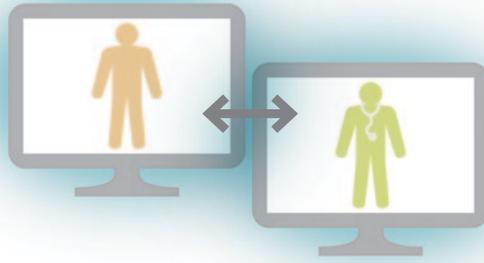
- HIMSS resource library of HIE-related information, including three toolkits.

[www.himss.org/library/health-information-exchange?navItemNumber=17703](http://www.himss.org/library/health-information-exchange?navItemNumber=17703)

### HIE Toolkit for Provider Decision Making

- This toolkit is designed to support organizations and providers who are deciding if HIE is a necessary technology or business option and assists them in navigating the variety of HIE options available.

[www.ohii.ca.gov/calohi/eHealth/MakingHIEHappen/HealthcareProvidersIncentivesforChange/IPAsandPhysicianGroups.aspx](http://www.ohii.ca.gov/calohi/eHealth/MakingHIEHappen/HealthcareProvidersIncentivesforChange/IPAsandPhysicianGroups.aspx)



## What You Need to Know About Communicating Electronically With Your Healthcare Providers

Electronic communication between patients and healthcare providers is part of the way healthcare is changing to become safer, better coordinated, more efficient, and focused on helping patients like you manage their health and healthcare.

You may be getting requests from different healthcare providers who have taken care of you — doctors, clinics, and hospitals — asking you to sign up to communicate with them online.

Why now? Until recently, most health records were stored in paper files. Today, healthcare providers and hospitals are adopting electronic health records and other information technologies that make it possible for patients and providers to easily and conveniently communicate with each other over the Internet.

Many providers are participating in national programs that promote electronic communication with patients. Some of the programs that you may hear about are:

- **Meaningful use of electronic health records:** a federal program that promotes the use of electronic health records in physician offices and hospitals.
- **Patient-Centered Medical Home:** a voluntary program that certifies providers who have developed an approach to primary care services or “medical home” that is responsive to individual patients’ needs.
- **Accountable Care Organization:** a voluntary program that brings together all the healthcare services a patient might need, usually for those with a chronic illness, and pays for those services based on how well they are coordinated.

Sharing information online with your healthcare provider is safe and secure. Strict federal and state laws help to assure that health information is available only to those with permission to see it.

Talk with your healthcare providers soon to learn more about what they are offering and how you and your providers can easily and securely view your health information, when and where it is needed for your care.

### Here is a quick look at the main types of technology your providers may offer:



#### Patient Portal

A secure online website that gives patients convenient 24-hour access to personal health information from the electronic health record maintained by the provider. In addition, a portal may allow you to make an appointment online, receive appointment reminders, send and receive secure messages to and from your healthcare provider, and request prescription refills.



## Personal Health Record

A PHR can be an online storage center for a patient's most important health information. There are two main types:

- **Tethered/Connected PHR:** This type is linked to a specific provider or health plan's information system. With a tethered PHR, patients can access their own records, add information, and, for example, may be able to see the trend of their lab results over the last year, their immunization history, medication history, or due dates for health screenings.
- **Standalone PHR:** Patients can fill in information from their own records. The information is stored on patients' computers or securely on the Internet. In some cases, a standalone PHR, such as a community-based record, can also accept data from external sources, including providers, pharmacies, and laboratories. With a standalone PHR, patients could add diet or exercise information to track progress over time. Patients can decide whether to share the information with providers, family members, or anyone else involved in their care.



## Blue Button

First used at the Veteran's Administration, Blue Button has been adopted by many private healthcare providers as a way for patients to access their health information electronically. You might see the Blue Button symbol on a patient portal or tethered PHR.

The type of information available through any of the technology options described above will depend on where the information is coming from — a healthcare provider, health insurance company, or another source such as a pharmacy or a lab — since each has different kinds of information. The types of important health information you may be able to view and download include:

- Current medications
- Allergies
- Medical treatment information from a doctor or hospital
- Test results
- Health insurance information
- Summary of the care received at an office or clinic visit

## Want to know more?

- For more information to help you decide whether a personal health record is right for you, go here: [www.oag.ca.gov/privacy/facts/medical-privacy/health-record](http://www.oag.ca.gov/privacy/facts/medical-privacy/health-record)
- Here's where to find out about your rights to your medical information and what you need to know about patient medical record privacy: [www.oag.ca.gov/privacy/facts/medical-privacy/patient-rights](http://www.oag.ca.gov/privacy/facts/medical-privacy/patient-rights)
- Check out this video for information about the benefits of new health information technology: [www.ohii.ca.gov/calohi/eHealth/MakingHIEHappen/ThePatientBetterCareThroughTechnology.aspx](http://www.ohii.ca.gov/calohi/eHealth/MakingHIEHappen/ThePatientBetterCareThroughTechnology.aspx)
- Find additional information about how health information technology can benefit you and your family at: [www.healthit.gov/patients-families/basics-health-it](http://www.healthit.gov/patients-families/basics-health-it)