

BY MARJA MAKAROW

How about a health account?

You have a personal bank account that you access for cash and information on your transactions and balance. Why shouldn't you also have private access to data on your health to help you manage your 'wellbeing balance'? After all, a person's health is their most precious asset.

The answer could be a health account – a digital database containing information on your wellbeing and health, such as medication and vaccination history, diseases and allergies, dietary regimens and clinical test results, as well as treatments carried out at health care centres and hospitals.

A health account could help prevent health disorders, such as

heart disease and diabetes, caused by crosstalk between genes, environment

and lifestyle. Ultimately, you are fully in charge of your lifestyle. Being able to follow data stored in your health account should thus inspire you to take better care of yourself.

The account could also be used to safely store and manage sensitive and complicated data such as your genome. In case of illness, this information could help the doctor choose a drug therapy tailored for each patient.

The vision I have shared above is not quite as utopian as it might seem. Important milestones have already been achieved in tailored health care.

Personalised drug therapy for leukaemia is already pioneered on the medical campus of the University of Helsinki. Cell samples of patients from the university hospital are delivered to the Institute for Molecu-

lar Medicine Finland, where the effect of 300 different drugs and their combinations on the cancerous cells are analysed. Within a couple of days the doctor gets the results and is able to choose the most effective drug combination for each patient. It has been highly rewarding to witness how top-quality research pushed Finland to the forefront in personalised healthcare.

Prevention and early detection of diseases costs far less than curing them – a significant point in light of the fact that healthcare is our fastest growing public expense category. This was among the incentives behind the Finnish health account system called 'My Kanta', an

interface where citizens can access data entered by healthcare providers. The project was launched by the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health in cooperation with the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (Kela) and the

National Institute for Health and Welfare. So far, 1.4 million Finns – 25 per cent of the population – have used this service.

Personalised health care emphasises the individual's autonomy and involvement in self-monitoring their health parameters. More and more people are collecting personal health-related data using activity bracelets and various apps. Next year, such data can be included in the My Kanta pages, turning them into a genuine health account and transforming the individual from a passive patient into an active, informed co-creator of their own health and wellbeing. And all this is available for free to every Finn! I'm looking forward to seeing how this will transform our healthcare system. ●

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