

Steps to take if you can't obtain your medical records

In the rare event that you can't obtain your medical records from a physician in the state for any reason, the Medical Association of Georgia (MAG) recommends that you...

- Mail a letter requesting a copy of your medical records to the practice at its street address – even if the office is vacant.
- Find a new physician as soon as possible and let them know that you haven't been able to obtain your medical records; click on the "Resources" tab at www.mag.org to find a physician in Georgia.
- Write a summary of your health history – particularly for the last five years – so you can share this information with your new physician.
- Ask your pharmacist for a list of medications that you have taken for the last 18 months and determine how much prescription medicine you have left and discuss any medication that you are taking with your new physician as soon as possible.
- Request a copy of the claims that have been submitted on your behalf for the last 12 months from your health insurance company. This won't serve as a substitute for your health record, but it will provide your new physician with useful information. Also let your new physician know about any pending health insurance claims.
- Contact hospitals in your area that you believe might have access to your medical records.
- Send an email to Susan Moore with MAG at smoore@mag.org; MAG doesn't have the legal authority to compel a physician to produce a patient's medical records, but it will attempt to contact the physician on your behalf.
- As a last resort, submit a letter of complaint to the Georgia Composite Medical Board (the agency that licenses physicians in the state), Enforcement Unit, 2 Peachtree Street, N.W., 36th Floor, Atlanta, Georgia 30303-3465.

Georgians should know that state law allows a patient or their designee to receive a copy of their medical records within 30 days; physicians are required to retain a patient's medical records for at least 10 years from the date of the patient's last office visit; and a medical practice cannot withhold your medical record because of a past due balance – though you might be responsible for the costs associated with copying and mailing your medical record.