Patient Care Experience Enhanced By Use of Online Journals

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Abstract

Patient involvement in their healthcare has increased with the use of electronic patient portals. The ability to submit updates to select sections of their medical record information prior to a visit is shown to be effective in enhancing patients’ care experience. Those patients who discussed the updates with their physician reported a more positive experience.

Introduction

The recent increase in development of secure electronic patient portals has given patients an opportunity to become more involved in their healthcare. Patient Gateway (PG) at Partners HealthCare in Boston, MA is one such portal through which patients can communicate with their primary care providers (PCP) and review selected sections of their medical record. A subset of patients using PG is enrolled in the Prepare for Care study. Three weeks before a scheduled visit with their PCP, these patients are invited to submit an online pre-visit “journal” that allows them to update health information and track their care. The journal includes information from the patient’s electronic office chart, and is submitted by the patient to the provider for use during a scheduled visit. Once the journal is submitted, the PCP can review and use it to update the patient’s electronic health record (EHR). Clinics were randomized so that their patients could update medications, allergies, and diabetes information, or family history, relevant personal history, and health maintenance items. A survey of patient experience with the journals was administered to evaluate patient attitudes and satisfaction.

Methods

Patients who had opened a journal after June 2006 were invited to complete an online survey 3 days after a scheduled visit with their PCP. Patients who did not respond were sent 2 reminder messages, spaced 2 weeks apart. The survey asked respondents to report their experience completing the journal, and the impact they felt it had on their care.

Results

As of 12/31/06, 637 (65%) of the 976 invited patients have responded to the online survey. The mean age of both invitees and respondents was 53 and 60% of both groups were female. Of those who returned the survey, 609 patients (96%) had completed journals through to submission. Of these 609 patients, 304 (50%) reported discussing the information with their provider during the visit and 282 (46%) indicated they had not (23 did not answer). 52% of those who reported they discussed the journal information agreed that the use of the journal improved communication with their provider during the visit which is significantly higher than the 15% of those who reported they did not discuss it (p<.0001). 66% of patients who reported discussing the journal during the visit agreed that the journal both provided their clinician with more accurate information and allowed them to feel more prepared for their visit. This is significantly greater than the 38% and 37%, respectively, of those who did not report discussing the journal (p <.0001). 67% of patients who submitted a journal would be interested in completing one again for another visit; 80% of those who reported discussing it would do so again compared to 54% of those who did not (p<.0001).

Conclusion

Providing online tools (journals) for patients to review and comment on selected data from their EHRs and sending this information to their clinician before a visit appears to be a valuable mechanism for enhancing a patient’s care experience. The majority of patients reported they would like to complete another journal before a visit. Patients who reported discussing their journal information with their clinician were more likely to perceive benefits than those who did not report discussing this information. Further analysis is needed to understand the factors influencing whether a journal is discussed during an office visit, such as journal content, time constraints, and provider interest.