

Lessons from Patient Portals

Redwood Community Health Coalition Promising Practice

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PROMISING PRACTICE OVERVIEW

This promising practice includes information from Humboldt Independent Practice Association (HIPA), Petaluma Health Center (PHC), and West County Health Centers (WCHC). These health centers have found success implementing patient portals. A Patient Portal is a secure website or app which patients can access certain health records, review lab results, and send messages to their care team. For years it has been acknowledged that the use of health information technologies and online resources has great potential to boost care quality and increase patient engagement in their care. Despite the advantages to both patients and providers, the adoption of patient portal use can be slow on both sides. The COVID-19 Public Health Emergency has shown once again how important it is to have a way for patients and providers to communicate with each other during non or limited business hours.

AIM

To increase the use of patient portals by health center care teams and patients, improving communication and connection.

MEASURES

Web-enabled Patients for Petaluma Health Center in 2020

Numerator: 19,239
Denominator: 36,004
Percentage of patients web-enabled: 53.4%

2019 web-enabled rate: 49.5%
2021 web-enabled rate (to date): 62.6%

eCW allows health centers to track the number of patients who are web-enabled.

RESULTS TO DATE

In the beginning there were challenges promoting portals to patients, however over time patients have responded positively. Parents enjoy the proxy portal, giving them the freedom to schedule appointments when they have time. There continue to be issues with patients who have low tech literacy and/or live in a tech desert.

Health center care teams were on board quickly and have enjoyed the ease of access to online information. This access saves time across the care team. Medical Assistants have less to do prior to an appointment and providers are able to get into patient rooms quicker. This freed up staff time allows more time to be spent one-on-one with patients and conducting outreach.

ACTIONS TAKEN

- Get leadership and care team buy-in for patient portal implementation
- Provide care team trainings for the patient portal including weekly webinar trainings and one-on-one trainings. Have care teams web-enable themselves, book an appt, etc. so they are prepared to answer patient questions.
- Web-enable patients in eCW when they made an appointment
- Provide care team and parent trainings for the proxy portal including group trainings, training documents, and videos with the goal of parents being able to schedule their child's appointments. Parent have access to child's account from 0-13 years old, after which they receive partial access until age 18 when the child becomes owner of the account.
- Provide patients instructional information (including short videos) for portal access and use, including a health center website link directing patients to the portal
- Use patient portal to communicate with patients, allowing providers to send resources about diseases and other health conditions

WORKFLOW

Web-enable patients in eCW upon making an appointment. Patients receive an email with date/time of their appointment and link to complete new patient paperwork.

Inform patients that the health center is no longer using paper forms and refer them to the online patient portal to increase accuracy of their information.

Send reminder to patients to complete paperwork through the portal or arrive to their appointment 45 minutes early. Communication is done through email.

Provide instructional and educational material through the portal that patients can access at any time.

LESSONS LEARNED

It is important to take time to work with staff demonstrating how the portal works. This allows staff to feel confident in the portal and assist patients when they need troubleshooting.

Health centers found that wording matter when communicating the value of the patient portal to patients. For example, tell patients why the health center is transitioning to the portal and how it helps them through time saved and more accurate information.