

# Using Health Information Technology to Engage Patients

## Question

How can we encourage our patients to use health information technology (IT) so we can better engage with them?

## Answer

Engaging your patients via health IT can provide many benefits for your practice and your patients, including enhancing communication, care, and outcomes. Research shows that providing patients with access to their health information gives healthcare providers more opportunities to engage with them as well as improve health outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

Patients can access their protected health information, test/laboratory results, and more with health IT and patient portals. They can also communicate directly with their healthcare providers. Permitting patient access to information and providing direct communication with providers also can increase the quality of life for patients with chronic diseases, and encouraging patients to participate in their own healthcare may result in better preventive care and improved medication adherence.<sup>2</sup>

Here are some ways in which you can engage your patients via health IT:

- **Take advantage of specific touch points in your clinical setting to tell patients how they can use technology to access information and receive education.** Some of these touch points include the receptionist at check-in, media in the waiting area, the nurse/medical assistant taking vitals, the healthcare provider or advanced practice provider during an exam, the receptionist at check-out, and an after-visit summary printout or follow-up email. Pre-recorded messages as part of the phone system also can relay important health reminders and tips. For specific strategies on engaging patients at touch points in the clinical setting, please

see the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology's [Strategies for Improving Patient Engagement Through Health IT](#).

- **Encourage patients to use technology (e.g., cellphones, tablets, and computers) to access the patient portal before and after their appointment.** Inform patients about the information they can access via the patient portal and other available functions (depending on the portal's capacity), including:
  - Communicating with healthcare providers.
  - Asking questions.
  - Seeing test results.
  - Scheduling appointments.
  - Requesting prescription refills.
  - Consulting health records and protected health information.
  - Reading patient education materials.
  - Seeing billing statements and make payments.
  - Receiving reminders about care gaps.
  - Receiving instructions on preparing for particular procedures or tests.
- **Be certain to secure direct messaging.** Ensure that the messages and emails sent to your patients are in a secure system so they can be assured of confidentiality. More opportunities for patient–provider communication via secure messages or secure emails may result in better transitions of care, more attention to routine health issues, timely exchange to address patient questions and concerns, better monitoring of patient conditions, and more.
- **Encourage patients to use mobile and wearable technology.** Obtaining data from your patients' wearable health-tracking devices can be beneficial in providing care. When you add that data to patients' clinical information, it may provide a more thorough picture of their overall health.
- **Consider telehealth as an option for patients.** Telehealth is another positive way to engage patients and improve access to care. Elderly and home-bound individuals, people living in rural areas, and people who have busy schedules may find it more practical to seek care this way.<sup>3</sup>

## Resources

- [Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology: How to Optimize Patient Portals for Patient Engagement and Meet Meaningful Use](#)
- [Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology: Patient Education and Engagement](#)
- [Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology: Patient Engagement Playbook](#)

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology. (n.d.). Patient engagement. In *Health IT Playbook*. Retrieved from [www.healthit.gov/playbook/patient-engagement/](http://www.healthit.gov/playbook/patient-engagement/)

<sup>2</sup> Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology. (n.d.). *Strategies for improving patient engagement through health IT*. Retrieved from [www.healthit.gov/resource/strategies-improving-patient-engagement-through-health-it](http://www.healthit.gov/resource/strategies-improving-patient-engagement-through-health-it)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.; Heath, S. (2015). Effective patient engagement strategies using health IT. *EHR Intelligence*. Retrieved from <https://ehrintelligence.com/news/effective-patient-engagement-strategies-using-health-it>

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