

MaineGeneral Boosts Referrals to Prevention Programs with Better Records System

Malindi Thompson

Summary

In 16 months, MaineGeneral Medical Center (MGMC) increased electronic referrals to prevention or management programs by 450% with an enhanced electronic health records (EHR) system. At least 80% of MGMC's patients are diagnosed with or are at risk for diseases or conditions that need lifelong treatment. MGMC wanted to improve how these patients are linked to and tracked within tobacco quit, diabetes prevention, and other living well programs. With support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), MGMC updated its EHR system.

Challenge

MGMC data show that 8 out of 10 patients are either diagnosed with or are at risk for diseases or conditions that need lifelong treatment. Given this information, leadership recognized the need to increase and track referrals to the most effective disease prevention or management programs. To best support MGMC primary care providers in achieving this quality goal, the hospital needed a seamless referral and communication process. With the hospital's existing system, clinical staff were unable to track and quantify the result of an evidenced-based program (EBP) referral. They wanted to know whether referred patients actually enrolled and completed a program. The challenge was to develop an EHR system that documented referrals and patient enrollment and completion of EBPs.

Solution

With CDC funding, MGMC Primary Care and the Prevention Center developed an EHR enhancement that tracks and documents patients who are referred to local disease prevention or management programs. After Primary Care refers at-risk patients to the Prevention Center, that division then links patients to tobacco cessation, diabetes prevention, and living well programs proven to work. The new EHR documentation process closes the communication loop between the referring primary care provider and the program to which the patient is referred. Results are reportable and useful for clinical staff in tracking progress toward reaching their quality goal of referring at least 10 patients per quarter.

Your Involvement is Key

Chronic diseases and conditions are the leading causes of death in the United States. For this reason, EBPs focused on disease prevention and management are vital. Referring patients to these resources and tracking their progress requires strategic planning. MGMC updated its EHR system to document every stage of the process, from referral to enrollment to completion. To learn more about the progress being made using information technology to improve health, visit <http://dashboard.healthit.gov/>.

Success Stories

<http://nccd.cdc.gov/nccdsuccessstories/>

Results

After updating the EHR system, internal MGMC electronic referrals have increased 450% from October 1, 2014 through January 31, 2016. The EHR enhancement uses a section of the electronic patient chart called the Health Management Plan, which stores information about ongoing health maintenance needs including cancer screenings, immunizations, and prescriptions. MGMC's Health Management Plan now includes EBP referral type (if the patient was referred by a provider or self-referred) and participation status (if the patient was contacted by the Prevention Center, enrolled, and completed the EBP). This documentation, at no additional cost to clinical staff, replaces the previous process of EBP outcome tracking with reportable data.

"Prevention is essential for patient health, and MGMC has a great resource in the Prevention Center. Next year, one of the quality measures for Primary Care medical staff will be to increase referrals to the free EBPs offered by the Prevention Center."

**- Dr. Melanie Thompson,
MGMC Primary Care Medical
Director**

Sustainable Success

Improving communication between MGMC divisions has enabled the hospital to better care for patients in need of disease prevention or management programming based on the most current science. The updated EHR system also supports larger ongoing initiatives by documenting EBP completion information in a way that can be accessed via reports. This feature will help MGMC with Patient-Centered Medical Home, Meaningful Use, and Accountable Care Organization requirements. MGMC is currently developing messages for internal and external audiences about the benefits of the updated EHR system, referral process, and availability of community EBPs.

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Contact CDC

<http://www.cdc.gov/cdc-info/requestform.html>

Web site

<http://nccd.cdc.gov/nccdsuccessstories/>

The findings and conclusions in this success story are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position of the funding agencies or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

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