

Kaiser Permanente Policy Story, v1, No. 8

Engaging Patients Online With My Health Manager

- The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' Electronic Health Record (EHR) Incentive Program rewards health care providers who "meaningfully use" EHRs. Providers, such as hospitals and physicians, must offer online patient portal services to give patients timely access to their health records, and they must demonstrate that patients use the portal.
- Providers can take steps toward meeting meaningful use requirements by promoting their online services. My Health Manager, Kaiser Permanente's online personal health record, was launched in 2007. Use of My Health Manager has grown substantially since then.
- Our success in engaging patients online stems from informing patients of My Health Manager's features and benefits at many points of contact in our system.

Policy Context

Following enactment of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) developed the Electronic Health Record (EHR) Incentive Program. This program offers financial incentives to eligible providers who use certified EHR technology to achieve specific objectives around quality, safety, and efficiency of care. Beginning in 2015, CMS will reduce payments to eligible providers who do not demonstrate meaningful use of EHRs.

A key objective of the meaningful use program is engaging patients in their health care. Providers must give patients timely, online access to their health records and show that at least 5 percent of patients viewed, downloaded, or transmitted this information during the reporting period. In addition, physicians (and some nurse practitioners and physician assistants) must show that at least 5 percent of their patients sent an electronic message through the EHR.

The Challenge

A 2009 survey found that almost 60 percent of health care consumers would like online access to view their medical records, schedule office visits, refill

prescriptions, and pay medical bills.¹ Fifty-five percent expressed interest in communicating with their doctors via email. While demand for access is high, little is known about whether patients would actually use these services. However, providers can take a step toward meeting meaningful use requirements by actively promoting the use of their patient portals, including the ability to securely email doctors and review personal health records online.

Kaiser Permanente Solution

Kaiser Permanente began offering online health services in 1996, including prescription refills and appointment scheduling. In 2007, we created My Health Manager, a comprehensive online personal health record. Members access My Health Manager by creating an account on our primary website, kp.org, enabling them to:

- view personal health information, including lab results, immunizations, past office visits, prescriptions, allergies, and health conditions;
- view, schedule, or cancel appointments;
- refill prescriptions;
- securely email doctors, pharmacists, and member services staff;

- take health assessments and programs that support healthy lifestyle changes and find information about health topics; and,
- manage health benefits, including viewing drug formularies and estimating the cost of treatments.

Kaiser Permanente's strategies to increase adoption and use of kp.org and My Health Manager include marketing, encouraging lab personnel to wear lapel buttons reminding patients to view their test results online, and noting on pharmacy receipts that patients can refill prescriptions online. In Southern California, our staff make computers and iPads available to help members visiting our hospitals sign up for kp.org and view the features of My Health Manager.

Finally, Kaiser Permanente works with employers who offer our health plans to encourage use of kp.org and My Health Manager. As part of their workplace wellness programs, employers can provide financial incentives for members to register on the site.

Outcomes

Almost half of Kaiser Permanente's nine million members are registered on kp.org, and most registered members have signed on at least once within the past year. Registration on kp.org and use of My Health Manager have doubled since 2008.² In 2011:

- members made 104 million total visits and an average of 286,000 daily visits to kp.org;
- 2.8 million appointments were scheduled online;
- 12.3 million secure emails were sent to providers; and,
- 29.7 million lab results were viewed.

Although use of kp.org and My Health Manager has grown, the increase has been uneven across demographic groups. Compared with nonusers, registered users are more likely to be older, female, and white. Additionally, our Medicaid members have lower kp.org adoption rates compared with Medicare and commercial members. Kaiser Permanente continues to

offer alternate methods for accessing services, and we are researching how to best engage members who do not currently use the site.

Practical Implications and Transferability

Boosting online engagement is crucial for meeting meaningful use requirements, but health care providers could also see additional benefits. For example, among Kaiser Permanente patients with diabetes, high cholesterol, or both, use of secure patient-physician messaging is associated with better blood pressure and diabetes control and more consistent use of appropriate screenings, which led to improvements in HEDIS scores. In addition, patients who are active on kp.org are more likely to remain members of Kaiser Permanente than are those who are not active. These findings may be of particular relevance to other health plans or delivery systems hoping to increase patient retention and to improve management of chronic conditions.⁴

Our approach to engaging patients online has been successful because we inform them about kp.org and My Health Manager at many points of contact – in the doctor's office, at community events, and in our communications campaigns. Health care leaders can learn from our approach by identifying the points of contact patients have with their systems and promoting their online services at each of those points.

For more information, please contact:

Kaiser Permanente Institute for Health Policy at <http://www.kp.org/ihp>

- ¹ Deloitte Center for Health Solutions, *Health Care Consumerism: Opportunities and Challenges for Health Plans*, 2009, http://www.deloitte.com/assets/Dcom-UnitedStates/Local%20Assets/Documents/us_chs_Health%20Care%20Consumerism_OpportunitiesandChallengesforHealthPlans.pdf
- ² Kaiser Permanente: Web Insights and Analytics, 2012.
- ³ Zhou, Y.Y., Kanter, M.H., Wang, J.J., and T. Garrido, "Improved Quality At Kaiser Permanente Through E-Mail Between Physicians And Patients," *Health Affairs*, 2010, 29(7):1370-1375.
- ⁴ Turley, M., Garrido, T., Lowenthal, A., and Y.Y. Zhou, "Association Between Personal Health Record Enrollment and Patient Loyalty," *American Journal of Managed Care*, 2012, 18(7):e248-e253.