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Direct Outreach to Patients by HIM Professionals Improves Outcomes, Patient Satisfaction

System-wide effort provides training in the use and benefits of a patient portal

BALTIMORE – Oct. 19, 2016 – Proactive outreach to patients by HIM specialists increased the use of a patient portal, improved outcomes and satisfaction, and enhanced communication between health IT specialists and providers, according to information presented Wednesday at the American Health Information Management Association’s ([AHIMA](#)) 88th Annual Convention and Exhibit.

A unique patient outreach program at Children’s Health System of Texas in Dallas deployed an AHIMA-credentialed personal health record (PHR) coordinator to meet with patients in hospital and outpatient settings, explain the benefits of the patient portal, and teach them how to use it to access their personal health information.

“As a children’s hospital, we cannot automatically register patients as we do with adults. We have to identify and register the patient’s parent or caretaker,” said Michelle Basco, RHIA, training consultant, Organizational Learning and Development. “We go out to the clinical areas of Children’s and get to know our patients and their caretakers, as well as their providers. We give them a hands-on demonstration of how to use the portal for everything from messaging their providers, to changing appointments, to accessing test results.

“We’re also working with our clinicians to enroll patients during office visits and the word-of-mouth from satisfied patients and caregivers drives the initiative as well,” said Basco, whose presentation was titled, “Patient Engagement: Teaching Patients to Fish.”

The program began in 2012 when Children’s was approached by the Office of the National Coordinator (ONC) for Health Information Technology to do a pilot project with a PHR for patients with sickle cell anemia. The patient portal allowed for messaging between patients and providers, and included medication reminders.

In the first three months of the program, patients’ satisfaction with access to their medical records increased from 43 percent to 100 percent; and satisfaction with involvement in managing their healthcare increased from 54 percent to 93 percent. Patients who said they “took their medication on time” increased from 64 percent to 100 percent.

Children's expanded the program when it acquired Our Children's House, a 39-bed facility, in late 2015. By the first quarter of 2016, 70 percent of patients in that facility were registered through the patient portal.

"We've now integrated our PHR into a system-wide electronic health record and are collaborating with many of our clinical and administrative departments to promote use of the patient portal," said Katherine Lusk, MHSM, RHIA, FAHIMA, chief HIM and exchange officer at Children's. "We have more than 32,000 patients or caretakers registered through the portal, with an average activation rate of 9.3 percent and more than 9,000 'hits' per day."

ONC's Meaningful Use initiatives for increasing patient engagement require health systems to provide online access to health information for more than 50 percent of patients, and to demonstrate that patients can view, download or transmit data, and exchange messages with their providers.

The initiative at Children's is augmented with handouts in clinics and doctor's offices that highlight the variety of tasks that can be conveniently performed online through the patient portal. The program also offers significant efficiencies for providers by reducing time spent on the telephone with patients and on preparing and sending paper records to patients.

"Patients and families also appreciate the convenience as evidenced by a switch from presenting in person for copies of records to requesting their records online. In 2015, 65 percent of all requests from families were via the portal," Lusk said.

"Patient portals are a valuable resource that promote patients' engagement in their healthcare. The information stored in the record remains accessible to patients if they change providers, thus enhancing care coordination and management," said AHIMA CEO Lynne Thomas Gordon, MBA, RHIA, CAE, FACHE, FAHIMA. "As the experts in electronic health records, HIM professionals can and should play a central role in advocating for patient access to their health information and educating them on the use of the patient portal."

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About Children's Health System of Texas

Children's Health System of Texas is the nation's 8th largest pediatric health care provider. Its 590-bed hospital serves nearly 283,000 unique patients, with 850,000 individual patient encounters. Approximately 50 percent of the care delivered at Children's is government-funded.

About AHIMA

The American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) represents more than 103,000 health information professionals in the United States and around the world. AHIMA is committed to promoting and advocating for high quality research, best practices and effective

standards in health information and to actively contributing to the development and advancement of health information professionals worldwide. AHIMA is advancing informatics, data analytics, and information governance to achieve the goal of providing expertise to ensure trusted information for healthcare. www.ahima.org