Meeting the Needs of Increasingly Connected Consumers

Save to myBoK

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Have you heard of the Conversation Project?

Started by journalist Ellen Goodman, the Conversation Project provides tools and resources to families to have conversations about end-of-life wishes—including a starter kit that contains probing questions for families to explore that can make it easier to make crucial care decisions when the time comes.

While its main outreach is to consumers, the project, in conjunction with the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, also works with healthcare organizations to ensure that they, too, are "conversation ready" and willing to listen and respect peoples' wishes and preferences.[1]

The project is an example of how, as patients become increasingly empowered, we're seeing an emergence of "programs in which health care organizations structure themselves to meet patients' needs and preferences—and in which those preferences help to shape broader responses on a societal scale," a *Health Affairs* policy brief noted last year.[2]

AHIMA has long supported the rights of patients when it comes to accessing their health information. For example, it's been more than 10 years since we launched the consumer-oriented myPHR.com. And last fall AHIMA announced its awareness campaign for the Blue Button Initiative, a cross-industry collection of data-sharing applications that connect patients to their records. We encourage members and component state associations to take the Blue Button pledge and post the Blue Button link on their respective web sites.

The initiative continues to be a high priority for the Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT, which this month will launch a national campaign to boost consumer use of Blue Button technology. AHIMA is participating in this renewed effort, so watch for special public service announcements on ahima.org and on myPHR.com.

The articles in this month's *Journal* offer a wide range of perspectives on this topic. Our cover story "Healthcare DIY" explores how HIM professionals can help consumers use new tools becoming available to them to optimize their healthcare through health information. In "Healthcare On Demand," Lisa Eramo explores some of the questions we must sort through as telemedicine technology increases consumer access to healthcare. Ron Hedges and Kevin Brady offer guidance on how confidential information can be used and misused in litigation in "HIPAA's Place in Court-Ordered Discovery." And in "Who Are You?" Tim McKay discusses how authenticating medical consumer identity has become increasingly important and highlights the latest technologies emerging to prevent medical identity theft, such as Kaiser Permanente's digital membership card.

All of these topics represent part of the conversations that healthcare is starting to have with consumers. It's long overdue. I hope you'll join the conversation, too.

Notes

1. Institute for Healthcare Improvement. "With The Launch of the Conversation Project, IHI Commits to Helping Health Care Providers Develop Systems to Honor Patients' End-Of-Life Wishes." Press release, August 20, 2012. http://www.ihi.org/about/news/Documents/IHIPressRelease_ConversationReady_Aug12.pdf.
2. James, Julia. "Health Policy Brief: Patient Engagement." *Health Affairs*, February 14, 2013. http://www.healthaffairs.org/healthpolicybriefs/brief.php?brief_id=86.

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