Patient Engagement, Patient Portals, and Information Governance

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By Kathy Downing, MA, RHIA, CHPS, PMP

Involving patients in the management of their health (patient engagement) encourages greater patient participation in care. It also increases the integrity of the health information stored by our health systems—patients will be the first to tell you if the information is incorrect. Patient-focused models are said to lead to better patient outcomes, more compliance with treatment regimens, increased quality of care, and lower healthcare costs. This is especially true for older populations and patients managing chronic illness. Further access to records, as well as information about the diseases from which patients are suffering and treatment alternatives, help patients feel empowered when it comes to improving health.

The second effect of engaged consumers is overall population health management. Patients or patient caregivers who are armed with knowledge can close the gaps in healthcare as patients move from provider to specialist to hospital. This has an effect on the continuum of care as well as reduction in costs from duplicative testing. Population health is interested in prevention and management of disease across the populations we serve as well as driving patient care to the appropriate type of service. Engaged consumers can assist with both goals.

It is worth noting that a current issue with patient portals is that many organizations are not showing patients the full picture of their records but instead showing only labs, radiology, or the ability to schedule appointments. Until we have information governance (IG) programs in place that examine information quality and ensure organizations that the information they have is trusted enough to provide it for patient view, we won't be able to reap the full benefits of the effects mentioned above.

AHIMA's Information Governance Adoption Model (IGAM) addresses patient engagement in a number of maturity markers. It measures the level of availability of information to patients and their caregivers as well as the healthcare ecosystem in your area in support of population health initiatives. It addresses interoperability and application program interfaces to give patients information to load into their personal health records. Don't forget all of the points of access to information and how important it is to include patients in the information picture as you begin your IG program.

Kathy Downing (kathy.downing@ahima.org) is senior director, information governance at AHIMA.

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