Four Ways to Increase Patient Engagement

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A Harris Healthcare Company

Patient engagement is a concept with wide variations in understanding as well as implementation. **However, there is one clear goal: to involve the patient and, as a result, improve patient care outcomes.**

Two well-known approaches have emerged to play an integral role in patient engagement:

• **Increased patient interaction** allows you to develop stronger relationships with your patients and encourages them to take charge of their own healthcare.

• **The collaborative approach of shared decision-making** involves the physician sharing the best practice based on scientific evidence, and the patient shares his/her preferences and values. Together, you determine options. This has become a widely accepted approach for supporting patient engagement. For example, it is now suggested alongside clinical recommendations based on expert consensus in the National Guideline Clearinghouse (NGC) "Diagnosis and Treatment of Osteoporosis Guideline."

If leveraged properly, EHRs can actually allow you to have more effective interactions with your patients and aid you in delivering a more collaborative form of care such as shared decision-making. Below we've identified four specific ways to use your EHR to support these approaches and ultimately increase patient engagement:

1	Take advantage of a patient portal.
2	Leverage technology solutions unavailable with paper.
3	Empower patients through visual display of patient data in the exam room.
4	Use your EHR for shared decision-making with your patients.

ONE: Take advantage of patient portal

Obstacle	Solution
Figuring out the role of the patient portal	Create a patient portal strategy

The patient portal is a repository and communication tool for your practice and patient panel. It can be an incredibly valuable tool, since it is one that both you and your patients can actively use. Most patient portals can be used for:

• Meeting Meaningful Use measures, including:

  – Sending patient records

  – Allowing patients to view their information and send secure messages to the practice

• Receiving/sending reminders for preventive or follow-up care

• Providing patients with educational resources

• Sharing laboratory and radiology results with patients

• Communicating with patients between office visits, also known as the "inter-visit space" (secure form of messaging)

• Scheduling/changing appointments

• Billing

• E-faxing at a practice

• And more

Implementing a patient portal is a twofold initiative:
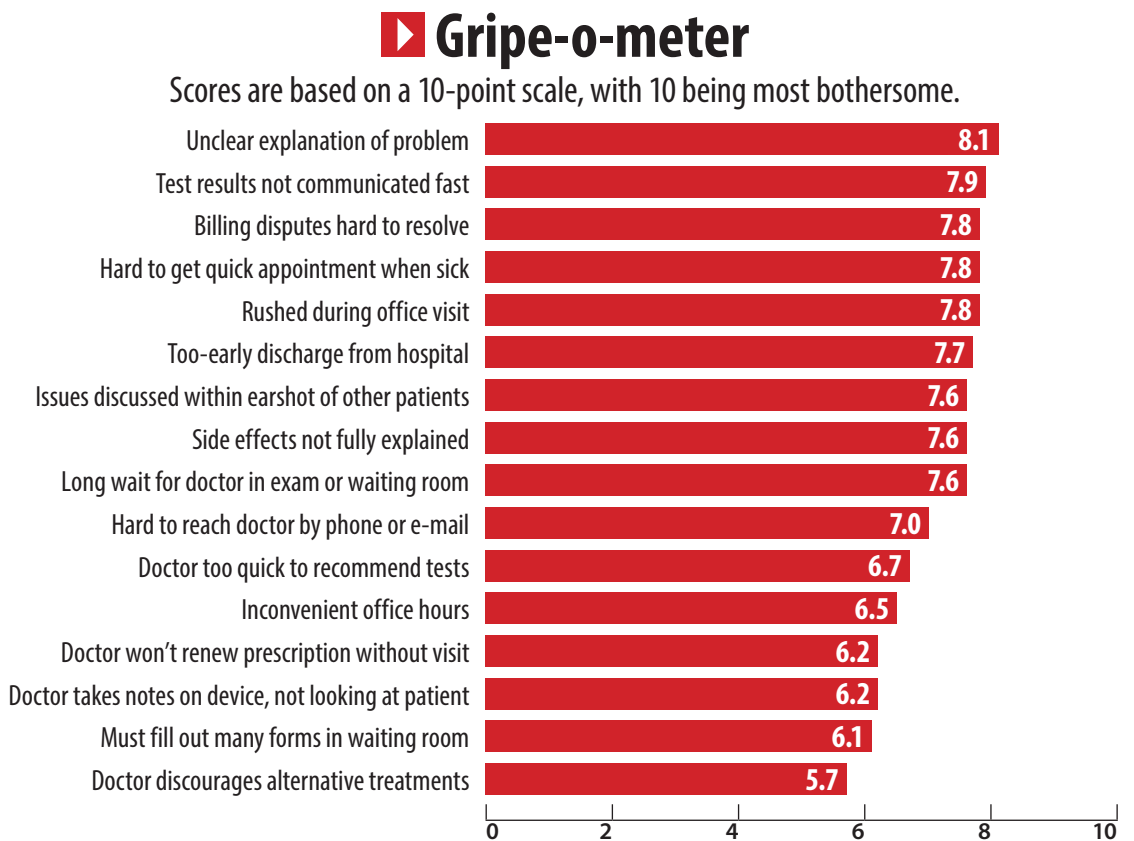
1. Practice Implementation

Start by making one member of your staff the lead on the patient portal initiative, and together create a clearly defined strategy that will help staff members adjust to their new workflow. The patient portal lead should identify how your practice plans to use the portal, as well as what the new office workflows will be for successfully utilizing the patient portal.

2. Patient Adoption

Next, create a strategy for getting patients to use the portal – patients should be educated on what a patient portal is, what they can use it for, and how to use it. Keep in mind that a patient portal is a huge benefit to offer patients, and once you are able to convey its value, they will likely jump at the opportunity to use it. Not only can using a portal help improve outcomes by giving patients the opportunity to self-manage their care, but it can resolve common pain points that patients tend to have.

For example, getting lab results has traditionally been a tedious process. Typically, a member of the practice staff calls the patient and leaves a message, the patient calls back and the clinician is unavailable, the patient calls back again and is put on hold for ten minutes, and finally, the patient is able to get his or her lab results. Therefore, the ability to access lab results and other data at their leisure through a patient portal will be a huge time-saver for patients.

Figure 1[1] below displays results from a survey conducted by ConsumerReports.org, asking 1000 patients about their "biggest medical gripes." Note that the second most bothersome pain point, "Test results not communicated fast," is one that can easily be solved with a patient portal.

▶ Gripe-o-meter

Scores are based on a 10-point scale, with 10 being most bothersome.

	Score
Unclear explanation of problem	8.1
Test results not communicated fast	7.9
Billing disputes hard to resolve	7.8
Hard to get quick appointment when sick	7.8
Rushed during office visit	7.8
Too-early discharge from hospital	7.7
Issues discussed within earshot of other patients	7.6
Side effects not fully explained	7.6
Long wait for doctor in exam or waiting room	7.6
Hard to reach doctor by phone or e-mail	7.0
Doctor too quick to recommend tests	6.7
Inconvenient office hours	6.5
Doctor won't renew prescription without visit	6.2
Doctor takes notes on device, not looking at patient	6.2
Must fill out many forms in waiting room	6.1
Doctor discourages alternative treatments	5.7

Source: The Consumer Reports National Research Center. Differences of 0.4 points or less are not meaningful.

Figure 1

1 http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/magazine/2013/06/what-bugs-you-most-about-your-doctor/index.htm

Below are several ways to help increase adoption rates and use of the patient portal among patients:

• Get your front office staff in the habit of issuing log-in credentials to patients during either check-in or check-out

• Encourage patients to sign in to the portal for the first time at the practice – this allows you to give them a quick tour of the portal and answer any questions they might have

• Email all patients who have portal access, requesting they log in and confirm their demographic information is correct

• Encourage patients to be proactive by putting together a list of items they want to speak with you about and sending it via the patient portal prior to the visit (this gives patients time to formulate their concerns on their own time and often results in them relaying more information).

TWO: Leverage technology solutions unavailable with paper

Obstacle	Solution
Missing opportunity to leverage technology to increase patient engagement	Identify and utilize features/solutions

Various forms of technology will allow you to achieve a higher level of patient engagement than you can get with paper. One form of technology that can be easily leveraged with your EHR are interfaces that connect to other products or solutions.

For example, interfaces with speech recognition software can be valuable for patient engagement, since they can increase the speed and accuracy with which you create patient records. As a result, you can have more time to interact with patients in the exam room during visits. **Figure 2**[2] below displays a portion of results from the 2014 Medscape EHR report. **Note that 70 percent of respondents said their EHR "decreases my face-to-face time with patients." Leveraging interfaces that will allow you to spend more time interacting with your patients, such as an interface with speech recognition software, is a way to directly combat this common barrier.**
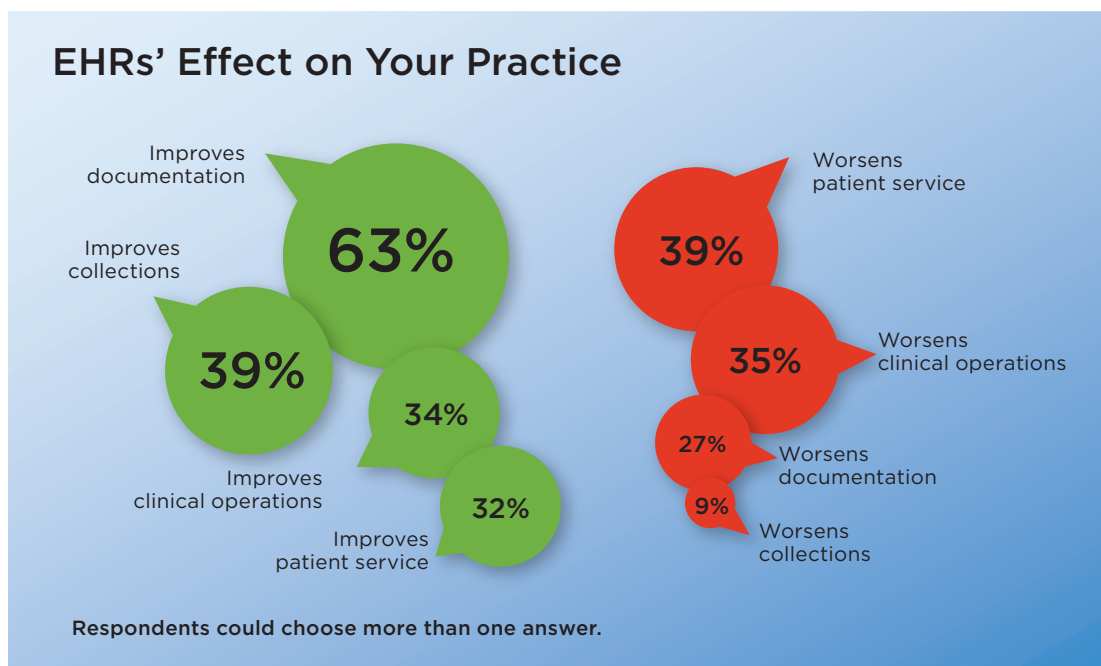

Figure 2

2   http://www.medscape.com/features/slideshow/public/ehr2014#19

Laboratory, radiology, and medical device interfaces can also help support patient engagement, since they allow you to import results into patient portals, which patients can access at their leisure. There are also features likely built into your EHR that you can leverage to encourage patients to be more proactive in their healthcare. Listed below are some ways to overcome common barriers that arise when trying to get patients more involved in their healthcare using your EHR:

Barrier	How to leverage EHR to overcome barrier
Missed appointments	Set reminders for annual appointments
Missed immunizations	Use clinical decision support alerts to remind staff to address the need for adult and juvenile immunizations
Seasonal flu concerns	Use report writer to identify at-risk patients
Population management	Use report writer to identify specific chronic disease populations for education, clinics, or outreach

THREE: Empower patients through visual display of data in the exam room

Obstacle	Solution
EHR screen is hidden from patient	Leverage technology for visual display of EHR

One of the most talked about pain points regarding EHRs and patient engagement is the amount of time it takes to type and look at the computer screen during a patient visit. One easy way to turn the computer screen into a tool for patient engagement is to involve patients through visual display of their data in the exam room. Visual integration can allow patients to feel connected to the process without getting overwhelmed.

Internist Dr. James Legan does exactly this in his practice by projecting Amazing Charts EHR onto flat-screen TVs in his exam rooms, inviting patients to view their medical charts, prescriptions, lab reports, radiology images, and more. The EHR becomes a "project" that Dr. Legan and his patient work on together.

Visually graphing BMI, blood pressure, and lab results over time, for example, makes the interpretation of trending data extremely easy for the patient to understand. Updating past medical, social, and family histories, as well as medications and allergies, is done with the help of the patient. Current USPSTF/CDC health maintenance/vaccination recommendations are reviewed with the patient. UpToDate, an evidence-based clinical decision support tool integrated into Amazing Charts, can be easily viewed by patients.

Dr. Legan's approach is just one way to use visual integration of data to encourage patients to participate in shared decision-making. Other solutions can be as simple as sitting next to patients to share your screen with them.

"Most of my patients really enjoy seeing their BMI graphs, medical history, radiology images, and other medical information. It gets them more engaged with their own health."

— Dr. James Legan

FOUR: Use your EHR for shared decision-making

Obstacle	Solution
Adjusting to a collaborative form of care, such as shared decision-making	Leverage features built into the EHR to help you adjust

As demonstrated in **Figure 3** below, shared decision-making involves determining the best care options with your patients, rather than for your patients. This modern approach of delivering care can play an integral role in patient engagement, as it allows your patients to choose care based on their unique values and perspectives.

You share the best scientific evidence-based practice

Patient shares his/her preferences and values
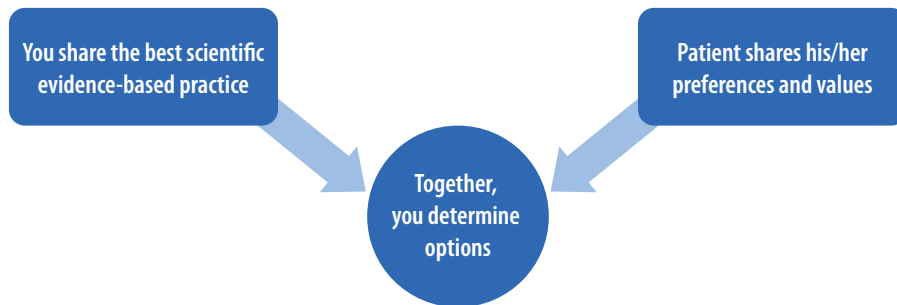
Together, you determine options

Figure 3

EHRs can aid you in this approach, since you can easily share your role in the shared decision-making process with patients by showing them how you use clinical decision support tools. Sharing your use of scientific evidence as you identify best practices will help your patients understand the positive impact this process can have on their outcomes. Additionally, the EHR allows you to easily review patient education materials together. Most EHRs have a collection of educational materials that can be accessed at a moment's notice and sent to the patient portal or printed for your patients to read at home.

Once patients understand your role in shared decision-making, you can help them understand theirs and the positive effect it can have on their outcomes. Here are just a few ways patients can contribute to optimizing their outcomes:

• Identify individual values, motivations, and health management skills prior to their next visit.

• View the literature you provided to consider various treatment approaches.

• Use the patient portal to communicate with you by email.

• Use the patient portal to set up appointments.

Conclusion

Viewing your EHR as a tool rather than a barrier for patient engagement is integral as you work toward increasing patient interaction and delivering a more collaborative form of care such as shared decision-making. Taking advantage of the patient portal, leveraging technology solutions unavailable with paper, involving your patients in the exam room, and using your EHR for shared decision-making are straightforward ways to support these approaches. If leveraged properly, EHRs can help you achieve a level of patient engagement you likely would not have been able to reach with paper.