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Title

Provider challenges and strategies with treating chronic pain: Informing development of digital therapeutics for primary care

Priority 1 (Research Category)

Qualitative research

Presenters

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Abstract

Context: Digital therapeutics are growing as a solution to improve access and quality of care. Increasing evidence has shown the efficacy of digital therapeutics in managing pain for patients, but they are underutilized by primary care providers who see over half of the patients with chronic pain. Engaging providers to develop and use digital therapeutics with patients in chronic pain management has become necessary. Objective: This study explored primary care providers' challenges and strategies in chronic pain management to identify needs and practice gaps that inform development of digital therapeutics for chronic pain. Study Design: Qualitative study, using a human-centered design approach. Setting: Eleven providers from four primary care clinics in Washington and Colorado participated in semi-structured interviews between July and October 2021. Population Studied: The sample (N=11) included seven primary care physicians, two behavioral health providers, one physician assistant and one nurse. Most providers worked in clinics affiliated with urban, academic health systems or in federally qualified health centers. Outcomes: Interviews focused on provider goals in chronic pain management, challenges and strategies used, and perceptions of digital therapeutics. Results: Four themes related to provider needs emerged: patient-provider alliance, team-based care, tracking and monitoring, and social determinants of health. Providers desired resources to streamline pain education, counseling, and goal setting with patients. Greater accessibility to multidisciplinary care team consultations and non-pharmacological pain treatments would be beneficial to providers and patients. Infrastructure and systems are needed for providers to systematically track and monitor patients' pain. Providers requested assistance with connecting underserved patients to wraparound social services and addressing healthcare access barriers. Conclusion: Digital therapeutics for chronic pain would benefit from incorporating multimodal features that strengthen patient-provider alliance, increase access to non-pharmacological treatment options, support population health tracking and management, and provide equitable solutions that require lower sophistication of device and Internet access. Leveraging

digital therapeutics in healthcare settings requires meeting provider needs at individual care and system levels.