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Title

Evaluating Patient Portals for Patients with Visual or Hearing Impairments: Provider Confidence and Communication Challenges

Priority 1 (Research Category)

Health Care Disparities

Presenters

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Abstract

Context:

The use of digital health tools like patient portals is critical for enhancing patient-provider communication. However, their effectiveness for patients with visual or hearing disabilities often remains under-examined. Ensuring these tools serve such patients effectively is crucial for healthcare equity.

Objective:

This study investigates healthcare providers' experiences and confidence in using patient portals to communicate with patients with visual or hearing impairments. It seeks to identify specific barriers and effective features that can improve the usability of patient portals for these groups.

Study Design and Analysis:

A cross-sectional survey using REDCap was used to collect quantitative and qualitative data from healthcare providers, focused on demographics, provider confidence, and communication challenges related to visual or hearing-impaired patients. Data analysis was performed with GraphPad Prism software v10 and paired t-tests were used to assess confidence level differences.

Setting or Dataset:

The survey included healthcare providers at the University of Vermont Health Network in primary care and other subspecialties.

Population Studied:

39 of 252 healthcare providers (15.47%) responded to the survey representing a diverse sample group regarding gender, experience, and technological expertise.

Intervention/Instrument:

Data was collected via a structured REDCap survey.

Outcome Measures:

The primary outcome measures focused on providers' confidence in using patient portals for effective communication with patients with visual or hearing impairments and the ability to ensure patient understanding. Secondary measures included identification of challenges and preferred patient portal features for improved communication.

Results:

The study highlights the disparities in providers' confidence, particularly in communicating effectively and ensuring content comprehension for visually impaired patients ($p<0.0001$), while confidence issues were non-significant with hearing-impaired patients. The responses indicated a need for more accessibility features, such as larger fonts and text-to-speech options.

Conclusions:

The findings highlight the necessity for improvements to patient portals and similar tools to enhance accessibility features and provide targeted training for providers. Improving digital communication tools for sensory-impaired patients can lead to better patient outcomes and more inclusive healthcare practices.