

Improving Electronic Health Records Patient Education Materials

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Summary: Health literacy refers to an individual's ability to read, understand, and use health care information to make decisions about treatment. An estimated 90 million people in the United States have limited health literacy. A low level of patient health literacy can undermine communication between physician and patient, resulting in substandard care. Therefore, health literacy must be a factor in health information and patient educational materials design to help patients get better care.

Abt Associates, in partnership with colleagues at the Mongan Institute for Health Policy at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) and Northwestern University's Health Literacy and Learning Program (HeLP), is leading a study to develop a rating system to assess whether patient education materials delivered by electronic health records (EHRs) are written in a way that is sufficiently understandable for patients to make relevant decisions and take action. A technical expert panel (TEP) has been established as a resource for expertise and guidance into the development of the Health Information Rating System (HIRS) and other project tasks.

MGH is leading the review of current EHR patient education capabilities and features. Utilizing the developed rating system, an environmental scan is being conducted to compile an inventory of understandable and actionable health information materials. Finally, the Abt team will inform EHR vendors and users of their findings on patient education capabilities and features. The team will also disseminate the new rating system and inventory high-quality materials.

Project Objectives:

- Develop a scale to rate the understandability and actionability of health information or patient education materials provided via EHRs. **(Ongoing)**
- Complete an environmental scan and develop an inventory of publicly available patient education materials that rate well on the new scale. **(Ongoing)**
- Review current EHR patient education capabilities and features. **(Achieved)**
- Educate EHR vendors and users about the need for and availability of appropriate education materials. **(Ongoing)**

2011 Activities: Activities focused on developing the HIRS by drawing from existing instruments, evidence, and the TEP. The project team has also executed the review of current patient education capabilities and features. Face and content validation of the rating system were established under the guidance of the TEP. Plans for reliability testing were established. MGH completed the review of current EHR patient education capabilities and features.

Preliminary Impact and Findings: This project has no findings to date.

Target Population: Low Literacy

Strategic Goal: Develop and disseminate health IT evidence and evidence-based tools to support patient-centered care, the coordination of care across transitions in care settings, and the use of electronic exchange of health information to improve quality of care.

Business Goal: Knowledge Creation
