

Providing Patients with Patient-Specific Education Resources

The Stage 1 meaningful use menu objective to use certified electronic health record (EHR) technology to identify patient-specific education resources will become a core objective in Stage 2.

Patient education resources can provide information specific to the patient's health condition, their point in care (such as whether the patient is newly diagnosed or has been living with a condition), and health care decisions they may face. Providing patients with appropriate education resources can help them remember important information, improve their ability to manage their health, and increase their participation in informed decision-making.



Types of Patient Education Resources

Patient education resources include traditional print materials as well as multimedia materials and various interactive formats, such as interactive decision aids and tools for patients to track and manage health conditions.

Some examples of patient education resources are

- **Informational materials** about health conditions, medical procedures, medications, and other health topics;
- **Patient instructions** that explain what patients need to do, including self-care instructions, medication instructions, when to come for follow-up appointments, tests and procedures, and when to call;
- **Decision-support tools** that help patients to understand the scientific evidence as well as the risks and benefits of different healthcare choices, and to make informed decisions based on the evidence and their personal values and preferences; and
- **Self-management tools** that help patients manage their health conditions, such as tracking blood sugar levels or asthma symptoms.

Information therapy is the prescription of the right information, to the right person, at the right time to help make a better health decision.

— *Center for Information Therapy*

Using the EHR to Generate Patient Educational Resources

Patient-specific education resources should be identified through logic that is built into certified EHR technology. It can use the patient's sex, age, problem list, medication list, lab tests ordered, or other patient information to suggest education resources that would be of value to the patient. Education resources or materials do not have to be stored within or generated by the EHR system, but providers should use the EHR to suggest appropriate educational resources for patients.

Factors to Consider When Choosing Patient-Specific Resources

Some factors to consider when selecting sources for patient-specific education resources include the following:

- **Breadth of health topics** – Are there sufficient resources on topics of greatest relevance to patients?
- **Accurate, up-to-date information** – Is the information evidence-based, unbiased, and credible? How frequently are the materials updated?
- **Availability in different languages** – Does the source include materials for non-English speakers and in the specific languages needed by patients?
- **Availability in various formats** – Are the materials available in various formats, such as print, multimedia or interactive, and do they meet the different learning styles and preferences of patients?
- **Reading level** – Are the materials appropriate for patients with low levels of literacy and health literacy? Do the materials use plain language and visuals to help in understanding?
- **Easy to use** – Are multimedia and interactive materials easy for patients to navigate and use? Is important information easy to identify, such as when to call?
- **Customizable** – Can providers revise the information to meet the specific needs of their practice and their patients?
- **Integration with EHR** – Which coding standards, such as Current Procedural Terminology (CPT) or International Classification of Diseases (ICD-9), are used to identify patient-specific education resources?

Good quality information materials, both printed and electronic, can improve patients' knowledge and understanding of their condition, including those with low health literacy. The impact is greater when the written information is tailored to the individual and reinforced by verbal information from clinicians.

— Angela Coulter, *Engaging Patients in Healthcare*, 2011

Tips for Providing Patient-Specific Education Resources

- **Provide education resources to the patient during the consultation.** This allows providers to review materials directly with the patient, point out critical information, highlight action items, and check for understanding. In the case of online resources, such as interactive tools, providers can demonstrate how to access and use the tools.
- **Ask patients their information preferences**, including their language preference and whether they prefer print materials or other formats. Offer education resources to patients in a variety of formats, such as print materials or via an online patient portal.
- **Place printers and computers strategically in the healthcare setting** so that providers can easily access printed materials and view online education resources with the patient during the consultation.
- **Automate the process for identifying appropriate education resources** as much as possible to avoid the need for manual searches during the consultation. Depending on the integration with the EHR, this process may be highly automated and generate resources linked with various patient characteristics. If automation is limited, providers can create a “favorites” list to minimize searching.
- **Provide patients a way to get more information** if they want to learn more, such as using a go-to-Web strategy.
- **Get patient and provider feedback on education resources** on a regular basis and modify resources based on the feedback.

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