



Recent Studies Support the Need for Better Communication Among Health Care Providers

The Markle Survey of Health in a Networked Life

Source: The Markle Foundation, January 31, 2011

A survey by The Markle Foundation found that majorities of the U.S. public and doctors share many of the same hopes for advancing health through information technology. Responding to parallel surveys at a time when significant health care policy changes were being debated and implemented, the public and doctors overwhelmingly agree on key requirements for information technology to increase the quality, safety, and cost-efficiency of care, as well as core privacy protections.

As billions of dollars in new federal funds become available to encourage use of health IT, this survey indicates that the general public and physician populations share similar values on making sure the money will be well spent. These findings are a powerful indication that both groups want public investments in IT to come with accountability and privacy protections, and lead to improvements in health.

Key Findings

- Many doctors and patients surveyed believe key information is lost in their health care conversations.
- A majority of the doctors surveyed indicate a preference for modern communication tools. Three in four doctors say they want to be able to share patient information with other professionals electronically. Roughly half prefer computer-based means to share information with their patients.
- A clear majority of the public and doctors agree that patients ought to be able to download their personal health information online and share information electronically with doctors.
- Roughly 80 percent majorities of both the public and doctors agree it is important to require participating hospitals and doctors to share information to better coordinate care, cut unnecessary costs, and reduce medical errors.
- Majorities of both groups also agree on the importance of measuring progress and setting goals for improving the nation's health in chronic problems such as heart disease, asthma, diabetes, and obesity.
- Roughly 4 in 5 of both groups express the importance of privacy protections as a requirement to ensure that public investment in health IT will be well spent.
- The public and doctors overwhelmingly support privacy-protective practices, such as letting people see who has accessed their records, notifying people affected by information breaches, and giving people mechanisms to exercise choice and request corrections.
- The public and doctors are largely unfamiliar with the details of the new health IT incentives, suggesting that education and outreach will be vital to the success of the program.

For more information, visit <http://www.markle.org/publications/1461-public-and-doctors-overwhelmingly-agree-health-it-priorities-improve-patient-care>.

Referral and Consultation Communication Between Primary Care and Specialist Physicians: Finding Common Ground

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Communication between primary care physicians and specialists regarding referrals and consultations is often inadequate, with negative consequences for patients, according to a recent article in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* titled "Referral and Consultation Communication Between Primary Care and Specialist Physicians: Finding Common Ground." The study, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, examines PCPs' and specialists' perceptions of communication regarding referrals and consultations. It then identified practice characteristics associated with reported communication.

Key Findings

- Perceptions of communication regarding referrals and consultations differed. For example, 69.3 percent of PCPs reported "always" or "most of the time" sending notification of a patient's history and reason for consultation to specialists, but only 34.8 percent of specialists said they "always" or "most of the time" received such notification.
- Similarly, 80.6 percent of specialists said they "always" or "most of the time" send consultation results to the referring PCP, but only 62.2 percent of PCPs said they received such information.
- Physicians who did not receive timely communication regarding referrals and consultations were more likely to report that their ability to provide high-quality care was threatened.

The three practice characteristics associated with PCPs and specialists reporting communication regarding referrals and consultations were "adequate" visit time with patients, receipt of quality reports regarding patients with chronic conditions, and nurse support for monitoring patients with chronic conditions.

These modifiable practice supports associated with communication between PCPs and specialists can help inform the ways that resources are focused to improve care coordination.

Access to this article is available at the *Archives of Internal Medicine* website (subscription required) at <http://archinte.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/171/1/56?maxtoshow=&hits=10&RESULTFORMAT=&fulltext=Reschovsky&searchid=1&FIRSTINDEX=0&resourcetype=HWCIT>.