
Patients Prefer Portals for Test Results



According to findings from a new study, patients prefer to receive the results of medical tests through password-protected patient portal websites. The survey is published in the *Journal of the American Board of Family Medicine*.

The survey was conducted with 409 participants and tested the desirability of seven different methods of non-in-person communication for three different types of tests: common tests such as blood cholesterol and colonoscopy results; non-HIV STIs; and genetic testing (predisposition to a disorder, carrier of an inherited gene linked to a disease and a carrier of a genetic disorder). The methods that were evaluated include a password-protected patient portal website, phone voicemail, personal email, letter, home voicemail, fax and mobile phone text.

The results showed that patients were more comfortable receiving the results through password-protected websites or portals. It also showed that while this was the most preferred method, patients were not entirely against other communication methods such as email, texts or voicemail for results of common tests such as blood cholesterol levels. However, they would prefer password-protected methods for sensitive tests such as non-HIV sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and genetic test results.

In all categories, the least preferred method for receiving information was via fax. Over 50 percent preferred receiving their cholesterol or colonoscopy results in four methods either through password protected patient portal websites, personal voicemail, personal email or letter. Majority of the participants did not prefer receiving information through home voicemail, text message or fax. 51 percent and 46 percent of participants preferred password protected websites for receiving results of STIs and genetic tests respectively.

Lead researcher Jeanine LaRocque, PhD, assistant professor of human science in the School of Nursing & Health Studies at GUMC points out that communication is usually conducted on a case-to-case basis since every individual has his or her personal preference. The objective of this study was to understand these preferences in order to improve doctor-patient communication.

"With these highly sensitive medical results such as genetic test results, patients may not trust the privacy of methods such as personal voicemail or email, whereas password-protected websites provide an added level of security, which may be necessary as these tests become more prevalent in primary care practices," Laroque says.

Senior researcher Daniel Merenstein, MD, director of research programs in the department of family medicine at GUMC explains that physicians often call or email their patient with results to common tests without knowing the preferred method of communication. However, this study clarifies that the majority of people prefer a different method as compared to the one that is currently being used.

Source: [Georgetown University Medical Center](#)

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Published on : Tue, 3 Nov 2015