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## Use of Patient Portals Still Low



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Patient portal use remains low or unpopular, with only one-third of patients having access to such portals and the other two-thirds either without or unsure of their access, according to results of a random survey covering 1,540 patients in the US.

The survey, conducted by Austin-based EHR reviewer Software Advice, aimed to measure patients' awareness, preferences and satisfaction regarding portal use. Healthcare providers can receive financial incentives when their portal system is used by at least five percent of patients - a meaningful use Stage 2 requirement.

The survey's results support the study "How Patients Want To Communicate With Their Physician" conducted by Technology Advice, a consulting outfit for potential buyers of software solutions. That study found that about 40 percent of patients are unsure if their primary care doctor even has a patient portal system.

Data from the Software Advice survey suggest that for many patients, using a portal is a totally new experience and that they need guidance from providers on how to access and use the system. These findings are also in line with those that recently indicated care providers have been slow to adopt patient portal systems.

Other findings from the Software Advice survey include the following:

- The top three most requested patient portal features were online scheduling (24 percent of respondents), viewing test/lab results (22 percent), and viewing/paying bills online (21 percent);
- Features of patient portals that caused patients the most frustration and resulted in low usage rates include staff responsiveness (34 percent) and confusing portal interfaces (33 percent); and
- Young patients (aged 18-24 years) were more interested in viewing test results than older patients, who preferred to view prescriptions/request refills and schedule appointments online.

### Orientation Programmes Needed

The Technology Advice study included a random sample of 430 US patients who had seen their primary care doctor within the last year. Based on the responses, less than half of primary care doctors are using patient portal software and have informed their patients about it.

The study's authors suggest that physicians invest more time and resources to educate their patients on using patient portals.

"Creating in-office orientation programmes to walk patients through the portal site would likely reduce the large number of uninformed patients. Such programmes would likely boost patient portal interaction numbers as well, and help physicians attest for meaningful use Stage 2."

The study also found that more than half of the patients reported that their doctors did not bother to follow up with them after their appointment. Of those physicians who did follow up, a mere 9.1 percent did so with the use of a patient portal system.

In terms of scheduling appointments, many patients still prefer using the phone although the younger ones (aged 18-24) would rather use an online calendar. Also, 42.7 percent of patients prefer to receive test results over the phone, compared to 18.1 percent who prefer electronic mail (email).

Source: Healthcare-Informatics.com

Image Credit: Wikipedia

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