

ACTION PLAN

Practice improvement strategies

Patient outreach improves compliance

Prevention and early detection are keys to successfully battling cancer and other diseases. From mammograms and colorectal cancer screenings to immunization programs, practices need to keep patients compliant, and outreach programs play an integral role in recalling them for recommended screenings.

Unfortunately, patient outreach initiatives oftentimes fall flat. A recent study in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* showed that provider reminder and recall systems are effective in increasing breast, cervical and colorectal cancer screenings through mammography, Pap smears and fecal tests. However, the study identifies barriers to implementation, which include administrative burden and lack of information technology.¹

To combat noncompliant patient behavior, practices use reminder mailings and ask staff to make calls during the day, which may not coincide with a patient's time at home. The key with any type of patient outreach is the collection of updated information.

Without it, practices incur the expense of mailing patient reminders without the ability to track information, according to an article in the *Journal of the National Medical Association*. Researchers reviewed patient follow-up on abnormal test results and found that the highest rate of failures in the management process happened during follow-up. The study showed that 34 percent of abnormal results lacked documentation of appropriate patient follow-up. It concluded that better office systems for managing patient follow-up were needed to improve safety and quality of care.²


Appropriate patient outreach programs should yield the following benefits:

- Continued attempts are made to

contact patients who don't answer their phones on the first effort.

- Transfer patients who opt for a screening to scheduling department.
- Valuable market intelligence is obtained from patients, including other locations where they might have procedures done and/or physicians who send patients outside the system.
- Patients stay compliant with important, recommended preventive screenings, increasing the chance of early detection and treatment.

"Updated patient information is critical to our clinic since we share data across the organization through our [electronic medical record]," says Tressa Saum, MSA, RHIA, director of associated physician services at Lexington, (Ky.) Clinic. "All providers and staff have access to that information, [which] is beneficial not only in providing quality patient care but also in maintaining accurate records."

Effective patient outreach programs help reduce risk and increase revenue. A successful program provides needed patient quality and continuity of care. 

Notes:

1. Baron R, Melillo S, Rimer B, Coates R, et al. Intervention to Increase Recommendation and Delivery of Screening for Breast, Cervical and Colorectal Cancers by Healthcare Providers: A Systematic Review of Provider Reminders, *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. January 2010 (Vol. 38, No. 1, Pages 110-117).
2. Chen E, Eder M, Elder N, Hickner, J. Crossing the Finish Line: Follow-Up of Abnormal Test Results in a Multisite Community Health Center, *Journal of the National Medical Association*. August 2010 (Vol. 102, No. 8, Pages 720-725).



By Jonathan McDevitt, MBA, chief executive officer, NotifyMD, Franklin, Tenn., JMcDevitt@notifymd.com

mgma.com

mgma.com/store:
Customer Service Smart
Pack - 2011 (Printed
version) Item 8406