MyChart Messaging: Patient Preferences about Timing of Provider Responses to Medical Advice Requests

Kristen Karpowicz
*The University of Vermont*, kristin.karpowicz@med.uvm.edu

Julianne Scholes
*The University of Vermont*, julianne.scholes@med.uvm.edu

Alicia Jacobs MD
*University of Vermont Health Network*, Alicia.Jacobs@uvmhealth.org

Rachel McEntee MD
*University of Vermont Health Network*, Rachel.McEntee@uvmhealth.org

Sean Maloney MD
*University of Vermont Health Network*, Sean.Maloney@uvmhealth.org

See next page for additional authors

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Authors
Kristen Karpowicz, Julianne Scholes, Alicia Jacobs MD, Rachel McEntee MD, Sean Maloney MD, Michelle Cangiano MD, and Marie Sandoval MD

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Introduction

- Patients utilize MyChart messaging for convenient access to their physician.  
- MyChart messaging allows patients to engage in their health care, leading to greater patient satisfaction.  
- MyChart messaging has been shown to improve reliability of communication and increase quality of primary care.  
- Portal messages have grown 157% since 2020, increasing physician workload.  
- Patients note issues with the MyChart platform, including technological barriers and inconsistent provider response patterns.  
- Elucidating patient preferences about MyChart messaging may improve patient-provider communication, potentially providing solutions that could decrease physician response burden.

Methods

- Designed and built a 12-question REDCap survey.  
  - Multiple choice questions  
  - Short answer questions  
  - Demographic information: gender, age, occupation  
  - Survey was sent via MyChart message to 31,502 patients in 8 University of Vermont Medical Center-affiliated adult primary care and family medicine practices.  
  - Only sent to patients who had used MyChart in the past year  
  - Survey was closed after 1 week.  
  - Data analyzed in excel and SPSS  
  - Several patients reached out with feedback via email

Results

- 2011 respondents; 6.4% response rate  
  - Respondent self-identified genders:  
    - Male (36.5%), Female (62%), Transgender (0.1%), Non-Binary (0.5%), Prefer not to specify (0.8%)  
  - Respondent ages:  
    - 18-39 (11%), 40-64 (36%), 65-80 (48%), over 80 (5%)  
    - 77% of respondents used MyChart to ask a “medical advice question”.  
    - 71.3% of patients used the “ask a medical question” either yearly or several times a year.  
    - MyChart messaging is always or often (69.1%) the first method used to contact healthcare provider.

- Patients note issues with the MyChart platform, including technological barriers and inconsistent provider response patterns.  
- Elucidating patient preferences about MyChart messaging may improve patient-provider communication, potentially providing solutions that could decrease physician response burden.

Discussion

- Most patients use MyChart as the first method to contact their healthcare provider, which may explain the increase in physician workload.  
- Patients prefer fast responses from their providers and providers are meeting this preference.  
- Patients use MyChart for several reasons:  
  - Some patients send urgent MyChart messages, which is not the intended use of the platform  
  - Patients believe that MyChart messaging is easier and faster than calling  
- Most patients would prefer to not restrict messaging to business hours.  
- Patient suggestions should inform future MyChart platform design.  
- Survey limitations:
  - Small response rate with limited diversity of respondents  
  - Data limited to Vermont and may not generalize beyond the state

Future Work and Recommendations

- Use data from Epic to determine if patient perceptions align with MyChart message records, for example comparing patients’ actual follow-up messages to their reported follow-up messages.  
- Pilot study to better observe the relationship between provider response time and patient preferences for physician response time.  
- Patient education about types of communication:  
  - When a message should be sent in MyChart versus a phone call made  
  - What to expect when patients call their provider

References


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