ATTITUDES TOWARDS PATIENT PORTAL IN MENTAL HEALTH CARE

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Introduction

A patient portal is a web-based software application that offers patients a secure and convenient means of accessing their health information and medical records including self-assessments, appointment details, and lab results. This tool empowers patients with greater control and insights into their own care. While patient portals have demonstrated increasing benefits within primary healthcare, their integration and utilization in mental health settings remain limited.

Objectives

This study aimed to identify potential barriers and enablers to wide utilization of patient portal in a large mental health hospital in Penetanguishene, Ontario. The two main objectives were:
1) to describe staff's experience with the patient portal on the pilot inpatient unit
2) to explore staff's perceptions and attitudes towards the use of a patient portal in a mental health care context.

Methodology

- Seven semi-structured interviews with staff members on the pilot unit were conducted to comprehend their personal experiences with the portal and gather suggestions for future implementations.
- A cross-sectional survey (n=63) was distributed hospital-wide using REDCap to gain insights into staff members' general perceptions of the patient portal, its impact on their work, and patient care.

Results - Interviews

Enablers	Barriers
• Direct and timely access to health information (medication lists, lab results) • Heightened patient autonomy and control over treatment plans • Ability to complete depression and anxiety screeners	• Patients frequently forgetting usernames or password • Certain elements of a mental health condition might affect patient's interpretation (i.e. lack of insight) • Patients get too fixated on insignificant lab/urine test results

Table 1. Table illustrates benefits and challenges observed by pilot unit staff with the patient portal adoption.
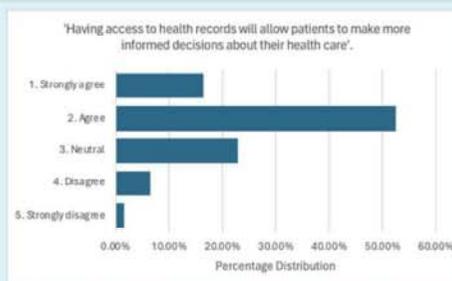
Results - Survey

Figure 1. Percentage distribution of respondents regarding patient autonomy.

Staff from other units expressed significant interest in acquiring more knowledge about the patient portal and its potential integration into their program units. Survey respondents also showed appreciation towards the benefits of patient portal. Approximately 70% of respondents acknowledged the heightened autonomy and control patients have by using a patient portal.
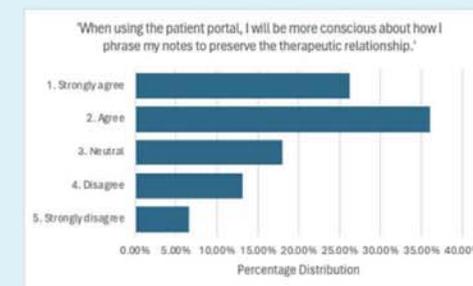
Results - Survey

Figure 2. Percentage distribution of respondents regarding patients having access to clinical notes.

Some concerns were expressed regarding patients' access to clinical notes through the portal, particularly due to the nuanced interpretation required for certain elements of mental health illnesses. Over 60% of respondents expressed the need for meticulous note crafting to maintain therapeutic relationships, potentially hindering the care team's ability to assist clients effectively.

Conclusion

Overall, the patient portal implementation at a pilot inpatient unit in Waypoint Centre for Mental Health Care was a success with few challenges that emerged. Pilot staff felt the portal adoption was successful and can lead to a positive change in care. Staff from other program units have also shown interest in adopting the portal. In the realm of mental healthcare, patient portals do possess the capacity to elevate patient care by furnishing patients with a more profound understanding of their diagnosis and the means to monitor their own progress. Future implementations should consider the need to maximize patient access to health information while safeguarding the fidelity of the documentation.

Acknowledgements