Patient Matching

Overview

Health information management (HIM) professionals safeguard health information in various care settings across the care continuum, working to ensure patient safety and privacy is protected through quality health record information.

Accurate patient matching helps ensure that clinicians have up-to-date information about a patient's laboratory, imaging, or other diagnostic test results; medications; diagnosed medical conditions; and family medical histories.[1] To maximize the safety, security, availability, and integrity of patient medical records, processes must be in place to ensure the proper matching of patients to their specific healthcare information in electronic health record systems (EHRs); this is key to the advancement of interoperable electronic health information exchange.

Since 1999, Congress has prohibited the use of appropriated funds by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to "promulgate or adopt any standard for a unique health identifier until legislation is enacted specifically approving the standard." This limitation has been included in every subsequent appropriations bill since FY1999 and is often seen as a barrier to public-private sector collaboration in accelerating and scaling effective patient identification and matching solutions.

As part of the 21st Century Cures Act of 2016, Congress called for the advancement of interoperable electronic health systems to ensure seamless patient care and to help realize the benefits of a learning health system. However, a 2017 American Hospital Association study indicates that 45 percent of large hospitals reported that difficulties in accurately identifying patients across health information technology (IT) systems limits health information exchange.[2] As health IT and EHR systems increasingly become interoperable and external data exchange between stakeholders improves, HIM professionals will increasingly be responsible for managing greater volumes of data while ensuring that each patient is properly identified and matched to their specific health information prior to the patient visit.

Current Challenges

- Mismatch between patients and their clinical data is an increasingly serious patient safety issue. The *2016 National Patient Misidentification Report* cites that 86 percent of respondents said they have witnessed or know of a medical error that was the result of patient misidentification.[3]
- Patient matching errors often begin at registration and can generate a cascade of issues including wrong-site surgery, delayed or lost diagnoses, duplicative testing, and wrong patient orders.

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[1] Available at: https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/696426.pdf.
[2] AHA, *Trendwatch: Sharing Health Information,* Available at: https://www.aha.org/system/files/2018-03/sharing-health-information.pdf.
[3] 2016 National Patient Misidentification Report, Available at: https://pages.imprivata.com/rs/imprivata/images/Ponemon-Report_121416.pdf.

- A survey conducted by AHIMA revealed that more than half of HIM professionals routinely work to manually mitigate patient record duplicates at their facility. Of those, 72 percent work to mitigate duplicate records on a weekly basis.[4]
- Continued hospital consolidation, increased consumer demand for patient engagement tools, improved data exchange with external players (e.g., HIEs, other health systems, registries), and increased market demand for data-driven analytics in healthcare will expand the amount of data that HIM professionals must manage to appropriately match a patient to their health information.

AHIMA's Request to Congress in 2019:

- Omit the 1999 language in the fiscal year 2020 appropriations legislation to empower HHS to work with industry to advance a nationwide patient matching strategy.

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[4] Dooling, J. et al. "Survey: Patient Matching Problems Routine in Healthcare." *Journal of AHIMA*, Jan. 6, 2016. http://journal.ahima.org/2016/01/06/survey-patient-matching-problems-routine-in-healthcare/.