

Practice e-Health

Following is the second article in a series to assist physicians with the various approaches, challenges and barriers concerning the use of technology in a practice setting.

Is a Disease Registry Necessary for My Practice?

Until recently disease registries were primarily employed by pharmaceutical companies to collect long-term data on drug use, side effects, and quality issues. However, third party payors are now **financially rewarding** physicians for producing and using registries on patients with chronic diseases to ensure patients receive needed services.

Not surprisingly, physicians who are now considering the feasibility of incorporating a disease registry in their practice question whether the cost, time, training and return on investment makes this the right decision for their practice. Practical considerations for implementing a disease registry should include the consideration of preventing specific medical conditions and/or exacerbation of chronic diseases. Better patient outcomes, increased patient satisfaction and a more organized, efficient practice are all possible with a disease registry.

So, how do you choose which registry to implement? The Internet is replete with articles, and the number of companies providing disease registries is growing rapidly which makes it difficult to decide which registry to use. In a busy practice it is difficult to find the time to review the literature and analyze the benefits/disadvantages of the many registries available. This article is a way to help you consider your options.

Practices don't necessarily need a registry to improve the management of patients with chronic disease; however, the basic information provided below is intended for physicians considering the possibility of transforming their approach. For solo or small group practices with limited resources or technology exposure, it may be best to start small and pick one area or disease you want to improve.

WHAT IS A DISEASE REGISTRY?

- A disease registry is a list (database) with the names of the practice's patients who have chronic illnesses, such as diabetes, asthma, coronary artery disease, etc.
- It allows entering and tracking over time of any diseases, patient problems, related test results and other indicators your practice wishes to track.
- A disease registry can also be a tool used to track preventive services (e.g., mammograms, Pap smears, immunizations, colon cancer screenings) for your general patient population.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A DISEASE REGISTRY AND AN ELECTRONIC MEDICAL RECORD (EMR)?

- A registry is a less complex application and it is easier to set up.
- A registry is considerably less expensive than an EMR.
- Many EMRs incorporate disease registry tools but the price of the package and concerns of return-on-investment (ROI) make them cost prohibitive for many solo or small group practices.
- A registry only keeps track of a small sub-set of patients; an EMR keeps track of **all** patients in the practice.
- A registry is sometimes viewed as a bridge before adopting a full EMR.

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WHAT CAN A DISEASE REGISTRY DO FOR MY PRACTICE?

- It can track when patients are due for services.
- ‘Ticklers’ (prompts) can be defined for early alerts of services due or lab/test values out of the target range.
- Automated reminders can be generated at point-of-care.
- It provides immediate value in improving care for needs that are predictable.
- Graphs can be produced that show patient trends for key labs, blood pressures, etc.; they can be used as an educational tool during the patient visit.
- It facilitates a proactive approach to managing patients with chronic disease rather than waiting to treat those patients when they present with an acute problem.
- Reports can be generated that summarize the status of a patient’s care for each measure tracked for a chronic condition and can be used as a convenient checklist for the physician during a visit.
- Non-compliant patients can be easily identified.
- Advanced systems generate reminder letters or automatically contact patients via telephone technology to get them to schedule appointments for needed services.
- Some systems incorporate quality measures built on guidelines endorsed by NCQA, AQA and NQF.
- A registry can help improve HEDIS and/or EBCR scores resulting in higher pay-for-performance rewards.
- More time is available for the healthcare provider to spend educating, counseling and interacting with the patient.
- Using a registry often improves coding and can result in increased reimbursement.

WHAT TYPES OF DISEASE REGISTRIES ARE AVAILABLE TO MY PRACTICE?

- A simple paper and pencil tabulation or an enhanced tracking system using a card file, reminder stickers, flow sheets, chart labels, **or**
- A software application (EXCEL) and/or database (ACCESS) that reside locally on your office PC that you can then use to create your own registry from scratch. Using a spreadsheet program, a list can easily be developed of the practice’s patients with a given chronic disease and then utilized to track key measures and remind the provider/staff automatically (through visual cues) when patients need certain services, **or**
- A stand-alone product that can be purchased with pre-configured data elements and pre-programmed with reports. Data can be entered manually or through electronic feeds from practice management systems, claims, labs, pharmacies, etc., **or**
- An application integrated into an electronic medical record (EMR), **or**
- FREE, public domain, software or registry tools available through non-profit organizations. Most often these are web-based and developed by quality improvement organizations. Few have real-time interfaces to lab or encounter systems and have a strong reliance on manual entry but there are no licensing or user fees.

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WHAT TYPES OF DISEASE REGISTRIES ARE AVAILABLE TO MY PRACTICE? (continued)

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WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS/COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH IMPLEMENTING?

- Monetary costs can range from 'free' to a one-time implementation fee with monthly or annual fees charged per provider. Some packages, which incorporate hardware, software and the ability to accept data feeds from facilities, can run thousand of dollars. This does not include the cost to maintain the system. Financial payoffs for complex electronic registries may be slow and uncertain.
- Time costs (auditing charts, data input, installation, training, working with vendors when glitches occur) can translate into decreased revenue from seeing fewer patients during the transition period. ***However, as patient data accumulates over time, financial savings accrue from less physician/staff time spent pulling charts and locating information.*** Of note, several of the above mentioned options require little training for implementation.

Reminder, the quality of the registry and its ability to provide your practice with improved outcomes is directly related to the quality of the data entered into the system.

WHERE CAN I GET FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE VARIOUS REGISTRIES MENTIONED IN THIS ARTICLE?

- Questions concerning this article can be directed to Carol Zima, RN, Performance Enhancement Coordinator, Managed Care Department, at (586) 753-0923.
- Information on specific disease registries will soon be available through the St. John HealthPartners Web site in late Fall.
- Cielo MedSolutions (www.cielomedolutions.com) is a disease registry that a number of St. JohnHealthPartners physicians are using. Cielo is a rapidly-growing provider of healthcare software and Web applications. Headquartered in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Cielo is pioneering a new category of healthcare IT known as clinical quality management systems (CQMS). The company's web-based Cielo Clinic™ software-as-a-service (SaaS) offering helps ambulatory care providers proactively improve, document and report on clinical care and supports initiatives such as patient-centered medical homes, pay-for-performance programs, clinical integration, quality improvement and clinical scorecarding.

St. John HealthPartners Managed Care Open House

When: Thursday, January 22, 2009 11:00 am - 3:30 pm

Where: St. John Oakland Education Center

What: Lots of Health Plan updates, information and fun

Save the date and stay tuned for more details