

Novel Health Literacy Incentive Program is Potential Breakthrough in Battle to Lower Health Care Costs

Oklahoma City, OK, October 17, 2019 – The open-access, peer-reviewed Journal of Medical Internet Research published a paper today that reports a potential breakthrough in the fight to improve public health and lower overall health care costs. The paper, authored by a group of researchers, physicians, and population health experts, examines the effectiveness of the MedEncentive Mutual Accountability and Information Therapy (MAIT) Program to improve health and lower costs in a sizable employee health plan, located in Oklahoma. In a five-year study, the paper reports that hospitalizations, emergency room visits, and overall health care costs declined 32%, 14% and 11%, respectively, after implementing the MAIT Program, a novel Web-based, health literacy incentive system. These results were driven by high rates of patient and physician participation in the program, and corroborated by user responses to program questionnaires and voluntary testimonials.

“It is extraordinary for hospitalizations to decrease by nearly a third, and costs to decline by double digits,” said co-author Dr. Susan Chambers. “After reading hundreds of patient and doctor testimonials, and reviewing thousands of questionnaire responses, it becomes apparent why the program is so effective.”

Entitled *Reduced Hospitalizations, Emergency Room Visits, and Costs Associated with a Web-Based Health Literacy, Aligned-Incentive Intervention: Mixed Methods Study*, the research paper describes how health insurers offer financial incentives to both doctors and patients when they access the MAIT Program’s website, with each office visit, to report to one another their engagement in a process of patient education and declaring adherence to recommended care and healthy behaviors. This patented process features *information therapy*, defined as “providing patients with the right information, at the right time, in the right way, so they can make an informed decision about their health and treatments.” The paper explains how information therapy addresses the well-documented negative impacts of inadequate health literacy, such as higher rates of hospitalization and emergency room use, as well as higher health care costs. This study is part of a larger body of research that finds patient-doctor aligned incentives produce superior outcomes, compared to traditional unilateral incentives. To achieve the benefits of aligned incentives, the MAIT Program employs the patient-doctor bilateral reporting mechanism, a concept the program inventors call “mutual accountability.”

In the study, clinical and economic outcomes of a hospital employee health plan, comprising more than 1,800 beneficiaries, were examined. Researchers compared outcomes in 2013-14, the two years prior to implementing the MAIT Program, to the three years after implementation, 2015-17. In addition to the substantial decrease in hospitalizations and emergency room visits per 1000 beneficiaries, the average annual adjusted expenditures declined \$675 per person in 2015-17, from the 2013-14 baseline average. This net decrease in total expenditures was 7.5 times the program’s average annual cost of \$90 per person.

Co-author Dr. Bob Roswell concludes, “Considering our country’s battle to improve health and lower costs, the implications of our findings and the potential of the [MAIT] program are significant, and certainly more than enough to warrant additional testing, if not widespread adoption.”

The research paper is freely available on the internet at <https://www.jmir.org/2019/10/e14772>

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