

## Consumer Engagement with Health Information Technology *Summary of NeHC Survey Results*

### Background

In June 2012, [National eHealth Collaborative](#) (NeHC) distributed a survey on consumer engagement with health information technology (IT) to the participants in the [NeHC HIE Learning Network](#). The purpose was to build an understanding of the general landscape for consumer engagement strategies, how organizations define consumer engagement, what they are doing to engage consumers, what challenges they are encountering and how they are adapting given those challenges. The survey was sent to 450 people who are participating in the [NeHC HIE Learning Network](#) and 95 responses were received for a response rate of 21%.

### Consumer Engagement Important but Strategies still Evolving

The vast majority, 59%, responded that their strategies for consumer engagement with health IT are evolving toward clarity. A third of respondents, 33%, indicate that their consumer engagement with health IT strategy to be not clearly defined at all. Very few respondents, 8%, consider their consumer engagement strategies with health IT to be very clearly defined.

At the same time, the majority of respondents, 53%, rank consumer engagement with health IT as high or very high on their organizations' priority list. In contrast, only 3% of respondents rank consumer engagement with health IT as very low on their priority list and 20% rank consumer engagement as low on their priority list. About 24% of respondents ended up in the middle, ranking consumer engagement as a 3 on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest.

Based on a list of options, respondents identified their primary goals for consumer engagement with health IT as follows:

- 68% improve health outcomes
- 66% deliver information to patients
- 59% enable consumers to take more responsibility for their health
- 59% reduce healthcare costs
- 57% improve consumers' experience in interacting with our organization
- 41% increase individuals' awareness of their health related activities (e.g., diet, exercise)
- 39% encourage healthier lifestyle choices among the people we serve
- 15% we do not have a strategy for consumer engagement with health IT

Respondents provided additional examples of their primary goals for consumer engagement with health IT including:

- Attract more consumers to use our organization's services
- Streamline communication
- Facilitate their authentication, authorization and other identity related activities required to provide secure access to health IT while also maintaining privacy

- Encourage consumers to help increase the quality, completeness and usability of the cumulative test results content in their PHR and standardize/harmonize its visualization across the EHRs used by their PCP and specialty physicians
- We do collaborative documentation and have found it improves patient participation and attitude in their care

## **Wide Range of Definitions of Consumer Engagement**

Based on a list of options, respondents indicated that they define consumer engagement with health IT as follows:

- 74% patient uses electronic educational material or online resources to learn about better health or their own health conditions
- 72% patient refills prescriptions or accesses lab results or other personal health data online
- 71% patient engages with provider through electronic means (e.g., telemedicine)
- 69% patient understands how their health records are stored securely, how they will be used and shared
- 64% patient enables friend or family member to review medical records electronically when appropriate
- 63% patient manages own health through the use of electronic home monitoring devices, health-related smart phone apps or online tools
- 62% patient uses IT tools and resources to manage his or her medical record
- 62% patient downloads his or her medical record and other health data to a personal health record or to a personal electronic storage device
- 60% provider emails or texts reminders to patients
- 60% patient makes medical appointments online
- 58% patient emails provider with questions
- 50% patient uses electronic educational material or online resources to find an appropriate provider
- 46% provider or patient uses online resources to identify insurance eligibility or healthcare costs
- 39% patient uses electronic educational material or online resources to review provider ratings
- 38% patient uses online resources to find others with similar conditions
- 26% patient purchases or accesses health insurance coverage online

Respondents provided additional comments related to how their organizations define consumer engagement with health IT including:

- Patients enter or upload their own health data (e.g., health history, allergies, medications) to make it available to providers
- Patients self-register online
- Patients indicate their preferences regarding communication, consent, etc.
- Patients contribute to and review their care plan
- Patient completes forms (e.g., consent) with an electronic interface
- Patient completes surveys for population health research or clinical trials

## **Organizations are Engaging Consumers with Health IT and Enabling Providers to Engage with Consumers**

Based on a list of options, respondents indicated they engage consumers with health IT in the following ways:

- 53% deliver information electronically to patients
- 47% offer patient portal
- 43% provide marketing or educational materials electronically
- 31% offer personal health record
- 21% offer remote monitoring to enable patient information to be transmitted to provider via electronic network
- 16% include patients on Board of Directors and in other leadership roles
- 13% we do not engage consumers with health IT or enable our connected providers to engage with consumers
- 9% offer remote patient visits

Respondents provided additional ways their organizations engage consumers with health IT or enable their connected providers to engage with consumers, including:

- Educate patients and increase their awareness
  - Get patients to know their rights regarding access to health information
  - Get patients to appreciate and share stories of how health IT helped them
  - Engage in dialogue with patients as health IT is introduced in hospitals and physician offices in order to educate consumers
- Enable electronic information sharing with patients
  - Provide the same clinically intuitive, standard format for viewing diagnostic test reports as integrated information so both patients and their physicians can view, analyze, understand and act upon efficiently
  - Connect data to any PHR the patient chooses
  - One-on-one personalized PHR registration with hands on demonstration and explanation of the benefits of having a PHR; some patients are on board while others have issues with security
  - Provide authentication and authorization platform patients can use to connect to portals and other online health IT services, apps
  - Offer patient portal that allows patients to set consents for providers they choose to view their health information through HIE, view current consents, attach an advance directive or healthcare proxy and request an audit of who viewed their information online
  - Soon offer ability for patients to send home health monitor data and subscribe to test results approved for release by their physician into a PHR
  - Collaborative medical records documentation
  - Organization priority to determine the most appropriate distribution of patient data; will do market analysis to determine the best approach
- Policy advocacy for consumer engagement
  - Promote consumer engagement policies in national programs
  - We have former patients who serve as advocates for patients and families
  - Plan to have patients representative on boards and involved in design/usability of electronic consumer tools
- Innovative approaches to data sharing with patients to improve engagement in their health
  - Telepsychiatry pilot project
  - Txt4health campaign

- Setting up a patient portal to provide access to clinical summaries and are looking into remote monitoring
- Clinical connected kiosks will be used to improve consumer engagement and send patient information into appropriate systems and/or PHR

### **Diverse Measures of Success for Consumer Engagement with Health IT**

Respondents provided examples for how they measure the success of consumer engagement with health IT including:

- Adoption measures
  - Number of hits to our consumer website, number of patient accounts successfully completed, number of consents set, number of documents posted to the HIE
  - Number of patients using the system
  - Number of care providers actively using a secure network for patient interaction (more than just email exchange)
  - Number of patients receiving text messages
  - % of patients engaged
- Usage measures
  - Success is measured not by the number of patients who engage with health IT, but by the level of satisfaction of those who do engage with health IT
  - Utilization of offered online services
  - Number of organizations whose online services are connected to our secure, trust network, and the number of services they have connected; also the number of users utilizing these online services
  - Success is measured not just by how many patients sign up, but how many are actually using the system
- Qualitative measures
  - Ease of connectivity among providers
  - Patients and providers communicating effectively and efficiently about the patient's health and wellness, confident in the privacy and security of the exchange
  - Reduction of errors
  - Ultimately, improved patient health outcomes (reduced chronic disease, reduced readmissions, etc.)
  - Success will be measured by adoption, use improved health outcomes, lower costs
- Financial measures
  - Increase in revenue through identification of needed services

### **Challenges to Consumer Engagement with Health IT**

Respondents highlighted the key challenges they have faced in engaging consumers with health IT including:

- Building support
  - Marketing the patient portal
  - Physician buy-in to the patient portal
  - Lack of clearly defined vision for what we are trying to accomplish through consumer engagement with health IT

- Assumption that consumers won't use or don't have online access creates challenges; should focus on target populations that are active technology users (e.g., baby boomers)
- Lack of patient awareness of what is available
- Development of policies and procedures related to on-boarding patients into patient portal
- Behavior change is required for both patient and provider
- Patient and provider lack understanding of the full benefits of technology enabled patient-provider engagement
- Technology
  - Would like to be able to provide patients with a single access to all their information from various clinics using disparate EMRs
  - Technology platform upgrades needed to accommodate new tools to perform these functions
  - Lack of interoperability and common standards between patient-facing systems and EHRs
- Competing priorities
  - Finding time to initiate consumer engagement program while implementing EMR, HIE and meaningful use
  - Focus, interest, perceived value, investment, ROI
- Privacy and security concerns
  - Patient concern about their health information being accessible electronically because they are worried about identity theft and/or security breaches
- Business models
  - Business models – who pays for consumer engagement tools
  - Moving landscape of meaningful use impacts plans for patient-provider engagement and information exchange
- Reaching special populations
  - Health literacy especially for immigrant populations
  - Issues related to minors and behavioral health

## **Conclusion**

Respondents generally consider consumer engagement with health IT as strategically important however for the most part are at an early stage in establishing their objectives, defining consumer engagement, devising specific consumer engagement tactics, determining how they will engage consumers and how to measure success. Progress is being made but a significant amount of work remains to be done in order to get closer to realizing the benefits of consumer engagement with health IT. Opportunities exist for coordination and collaboration as well as best practice collection and dissemination in order to accelerate achievement of the potential improvements in health outcomes that can result from effective consumer engagement in health IT.