

Disease Management NEWS

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Evidence Mounts on Benefits of Information Therapy in DM

More evidence has emerged to suggest that so-called “information prescriptions” can enhance the success of disease management (DM) programs, particularly when they are used in combination with predictive modeling.

Information prescriptions form the structure of a technique that proponents call “information therapy,” or Ix, which they define as the timely prescription and availability of evidence-based health information to meet individuals’ specific needs and support sound decision making. Ix proponents claim that information therapy delivered to people right before or after a physician visit, medical test, surgical procedure, or at any other specific moment in care can help people better manage their conditions.

New research suggests that using predictive models to identify those moments in care when information prescriptions can benefit people can lead to better health for patients and better bottom lines for their health plans, says Stephen Schneider, M.D., chief medical officer of Healthwise, a Boise, Idaho-based healthcare consulting firm that helps healthcare organizations provide decision-support and self-management information to the people they serve.

“Predictive models can be used to identify and prescribe the specific information each patient needs to improve self-management and health decisions,” Schneider tells *DM News*. “When the low-cost intervention of information therapy for every patient is com-

bined with more resource-intensive interventions by care counselors for those who are more intensively ill, disease management programs can cost-effectively reach everyone in a chronic care population. This will provide greater value to both the patients and the health plans that serve them.”

Because the cost of an information prescription is exceptionally small when compared with a nurse call, DM programs can afford to send information prescriptions to their entire populations with little financial impact, Schneider says. And when combined with information that surfaces from predictive modeling, those information prescriptions can be mass personalized to deliver information specifically helpful to each person at the moment in care he or she is currently experiencing, he says.

“The economics of call center-based disease management has required disease management companies to focus that relatively expensive resource on the patients with the highest modifiable costs,” Schneider explains. “Until now, predictive modeling has focused on identifying those patients with increased accuracy in order to maximize the return of the call center’s outbound calls. The results have been impressive based on cost-effectiveness of effort but have not significantly reduced overall and long-term costs.”

Information prescriptions can help to reduce those long-term costs, Schneider suggests. “With predictive models to trigger the

right information prescription, and with patient portals to deliver the prescription conveniently and confidentially to the patient, disease management programs can extend their reach, their value proposition and their impact on health.”

Most DM firms and health plans involved in DM already have two of the three pieces needed to blend Ix into the DM equation, Schneider says. They are online member portals and predictive modeling software. All that’s needed to complete the triangle is information therapy content and a messaging system, which involve minimal costs to implement, Schneider says. “Marginal investments in this infrastructure now offer expansive opportunities for helping people receive better care, achieve better outcomes and strengthen their loyalty bonds with their health plans,” he says.

The evidence-based information delivered in the information prescription sits at the core of an information therapy application, Schneider says. However, it takes more than good information to make information therapy work, he adds. “In order to have the robust flexibility to handle any set of moments in care predicted by the predictive modeling platform, the content must have rich metadata embedded at a very granular or content-specific level,” he explains. “Metadata is technical jargon for information about the information. The metadata for health content should not only link it to specific diagnoses or treatments but also to the patient’s moment in care and to the demo-

graphics of those for whom the information is relevant.”

In addition to the actual information prescription, the messaging developed for delivering the information prescription to the patient is also important, Schneider says. “Depend-ing on the quality of the message, the patient may accept the information prescription as a significant new benefit or as an intolerable assault upon the patient’s privacy. Both content and messaging are important to the success of the program.”

Once the information technology infrastructure for the information therapy/predictive modeling program is in place, opportunities abound for DM firms and health plans involved in DM to add low-cost, high-value applications, Schneider believes. “Information therapy adds value by connecting the right information to the decision making that influences medical outcomes and medical costs,” he says.

Schneider offers more details on how information therapy can

benefit DM programs in a white paper available on his firm’s web site at www.healthwise.org.

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Figure 1: Predictive Triggers and Related Information Prescriptions

| Predictive Trigger | Information Prescription |
|---|---|
| New diagnosis of hypertension | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring your blood pressure at home Tips for following the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet Reducing salt |
| Diagnosis of depression | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Should I take medications to treat depression? Tips for reducing the cost of depression medication Exercise to reduce depression |
| Congestive heart failure plus weight gain | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eating less sodium when you have heart failure Body weight monitoring and heart failure |
| Coronary artery disease diagnosis plus treadmill test | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CAD treatment overview Treadmill test: Post test—understanding the results Should I have angiography to test for coronary artery disease? |

Source: Predictive Modeling and Information Therapy, Healthwise.