Internet based Care Enhancement Tools: Two Examples from the Real World

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Abstract

Americans are utilizing the Internet to find information about their healthcare, and that information is affecting their health behavior. Existing health information sites focus on providing information or enhancing communication via bulletin boards and online chat. There are few examples of health websites that actively assist the online user. We discuss two tools that provide active support via decision-support (CarePlanner) and coordination of care (ADHDLivingGuide).

Internet Health Information Seeking

The use of the Internet for personal health management is revolutionizing the health care field. The Internet has become a significant source for health information. As many as 98 million1 have gone online for health or medical information. Close to half of the health seekers surveyed indicated that their behavior had been influenced by what they read on the Internet both for their own care, and for others in their care[2]. We are developing two Internet-based tools that provide care enhancement for consumers: the ADHDLiving Guide, and the CarePlanner. Each tool is designed to be used by the consumer via the Internet, and to provide health information and feedback that the consumer can then discuss with their health care provider.

CarePlanner

CarePlanner is a computer-based decision-support tool that can help seniors (and those with similar limitations to seniors), caregivers, and state Medicaid and social service agencies make decisions about the most appropriate living environment for a senior. The CarePlanner is not a decision making tool, but a decision support tool. It takes individual’s circumstances and preferences into account and identifies the benefits and risks of various living and support arrangements. The purpose of the CarePlanner is to help state Medicaid and social service agencies identify and manage risks of beneficiaries in a variety of community settings. Data collection items in CarePlanner were modeled after the Minimum Data Set (MDS) and other scales, we also edited and added items based on feedback from federal and state representatives and health professionals. After completing the data collection questions, the user receives a “Benefit/Risk Report” for each living option that he/she is considering. CarePlanner includes a rich database of reliable comprehensive information on senior care.

ADHDLiving Guide

ADHDLivingGuide.com addresses the needs of children with ADHD and their parents. Several care providers are usually involved in the treatment of a child with ADHD, and coordinating the feedback from these individuals can greatly improve the child’s care. ADHDLivingGuide acts as a care coordination tool, with interactive features such as medication management functions, behavioral therapy treatment tools (behavioral plans, etc.), discussion boards, and general content. The website has content specifically designed for parents, elementary school aged children, and teenagers, as well as teachers and physicians. By providing an online community for the child with ADHD, his or her parent and treatment team, ADHDLivingGuide works to enhance the quality of life as well as quality of, and satisfaction with, the child’s ADHD treatment. A six-month evaluation of the site with 104 parent-child teams is scheduled to begin in August 2001.

Conclusion

Care Enhancement tools such as the ADHDLivingGuide and the CarePlanner allow consumers to take advantage of the power and patience of the Internet to provide answers to health questions at a time that it is convenient for the user. Each tool provides added value by using the connection features of the Internet to provide and organize information at the touch of a key or click of the mouse. The Internet provides a unique environment for improving care coordination and planning. Health care providers can seize this opportunity to provide improved care to patients. The tools discussed here are two examples of how the power and presence of the Internet can be harnessed to that end.

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References

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