Electronic Reminders to HIV Providers Improve Patient Outcomes

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Computerized alerts to health care providers about their HIV patients improved patient outcomes in a study of one large clinic in Boston. Researchers at Harvard's Massachusetts General Hospital HIV Clinic, which already had an electronic medical records system, sought to study the efficacy of a more dynamic system of alerts about patient health status and engagement in care. The results of the study were published online in Annals of Internal Medicine.

Researchers established a computerized system in which Mass General's HIV providers received electronic alerts in the event of a patient's virologic failure, any evidence that the patient was not keeping or scheduling appointments properly, or any out of 11 abnormal lab results. The study then randomly divided 1,011 HIV patients into two groups. For the first group, the 33 participating health providers only received the alerts on a particular patient's electronic records page. For the control half of the patient cohort, providers received additional emails about the patient alerts every other week, which included hyperlinks to lab results, information about appointment engagement, and records of any past alerts.

Patients whose providers received the extra alerts experienced an average monthly CD4 cell increase of 5.3 while those in the control arm had a 3.2 cell increase, which was a significant difference. Those in the intervention group also had significantly lower rates of missed appointments or deficits of scheduled appointments. Ninety percent of the participating providers were in favor of adopting the intervention program into their standard of care.

The researchers cautioned that their findings are limited by the fact that the study was conducted in a single clinic that already had a relatively advanced system of electronic medical records.

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