Electronic Health Record Facilitates Rapid Implementation of Health Literacy Assessment
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Background

The Institute for Family Health (IFH) is a federally qualified community health network serving over 80,000 patients at 26 locations throughout New York State. Many IFH patients come from low literacy communities such as East Harlem and the South Bronx.

East Harlem is home to one of IFH’s largest sites, The Family Health Center of Harlem (FHCH). In East Harlem, 17% of adults 25 and older never completed 8th grade, and another 16% never graduated from high school.

In the Bronx, where IFH has multiple sites, 30% of people over 25 years of age have never earned a High School diploma.

Implications for Practice

Sustaining high rates of health literacy assessment is difficult in busy out-patient settings. Utilizing the EHR and offering small incentives is an effective way to enhance use of assessment tools that lead to patients being better informed about their health conditions and options regarding healthcare decisions.

Introduction

Patient's health literacy deficits impact their ability to receive health care information. Assessing patient literacy can lead to delivery of health care information at an appropriate level for patient comprehension. Furthermore, building unique patient health literacy information into the Electronic Health Record (EHR) using the REALM-SF tool can be an efficient and effective utilization method for patient’s care team members thus eliminating the patient’s need to restate health literacy deficits at every encounter.

Goals

This project was conceptualized in four segments: the “Pre-Pilot Phase”, “Pilot Phase”, “Introduction Phase”, and the “Expansion Phase.” The first two phases were focused on HIV services only. The last two phases saw screening expand to patients regardless of their medical condition.

Aim 1: Raise staff awareness related to patient health literacy

- Identify IFH patient’s health literacy levels

Aim 2: Make health literacy screening quick and easy for employees

- Embed the REALM-SF in EHR

Results

After introducing the embedded REALM-SF test into our EHR, orientation with role play, webinars, and offering incentives for testing, we have seen an increase of 25-30% use over baseline in 2014.

Future Directions

IFH’s user friendly version of the embedded REALM-SF is being upgraded:

Easier to read views in the EHR

Tips for addressing health literacy deficits have been added

This question will be added to assess for health literacy deficits in languages other than English,

"Have you ever had trouble understanding health related documents?"