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Title: Direct notification of abnormal test results to patients: what do Emergency Department clinicians’ think?

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Abstract

Missed or delayed test results are a significant safety problem, particularly in emergency department settings. Failure to follow up abnormal test results can lead to delays in diagnosis and treatment. A number of studies have shown that patients are interested in having access to their test results. However, physicians have expressed concern about the effects of increased patient access to information on physician workload and patient anxiety and confusion.

Direct automatic notification of test results to patients is seen as one way in which the likelihood of results’ being missed is reduced. This can be achieved through electronic means, such as patient portals, or through traditional mechanisms such as fax, mail or phone. The aim of this study is to examine ED physicians’ perceptions regarding automatic notification of significantly abnormal results to patients. Significantly abnormal results are defined as a test result that is not life threatening but needs short term follow-up (for example, a chest x-ray with new shadow).

A cross-sectional survey will be administered to the population of staff specialists and registrars (n=20) from one Emergency Department in an Australian metropolitan teaching hospital. A survey instrument consisting of closed-ended questions with Likert scale responses has been developed based on literature and surveys related to patients’ and physicians’ access to clinical information. Questions focus on: practices for patient notification of abnormal test results; institutional policies; responsibility for test notification; and perceptions on automatic notification of results to patients. The survey was pilot tested with 5 senior ED physicians from a similar hospital. The survey is being administered during May 2012. Data will be entered into SPSS and descriptive statistics calculated with frequencies and proportions. Results will be presented on how favorably physicians perceive automatic e-notification in relation to current practices and responsibility for test notification. The study has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the study site.

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References

