Identifying How Patient Portals May Be Effectively Used Among Mental Health Populations to Support Digital Inclusion: A Study Protocol

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Abstract

Patient portals are secure online websites that allow patients access to their medical information from a particular healthcare organization. Currently, it is unknown how this technology can best be used to support patients with mental illness, and what types of indicators of portal adoption are meaningful to these patients. This study addresses this gap in our knowledge by obtaining the perspectives on this topic from patients, family members and Peer Support Workers.

Keywords: mental health; psychiatry; patient portals, patient engagement

Introduction

Information included in typical patient portals include lab results, clinician notes, medication information, and results from other tests. Sometimes patient portals have other functions like being able to send a message to a clinician, requesting a prescription renewal, booking an appointment, being reminded of an appointment, entering personal information, and answering questionnaires [1]. To date, there are less patient portals in mental health settings in comparison to non-mental health settings [2]. In order to evaluate how patient portal technology can be best used within a mental health setting, it is necessary to learn how the technology may be effectively used by patients seeking mental health services, and what process and outcome indicators are meaningful to this population. In doing this work, researchers will know what aspects of use of the technology should be measured when evaluating patient portals within mental health contexts more broadly. Thus, the objectives of this study are to: 1) Understand how patient portals can be effectively used by patients with mental illness to engage in their own care; and 2) Identify process and outcome indicators of effective patient portal use that are meaningful to patients with mental illness.

Methods

This study will be conducted using a qualitative descriptive design [3]. Specifically, five focus groups will be conducted: two focus groups with mental health patients, two focus groups with family members, and one focus group with Peer Support Workers (people with lived experience of mental illness who work in a supportive role directly with mental health patients). Each focus group will consist of 6-10 participants. A Peer Support Worker will be hired to lead the focus group discussions for both the mental health patient and family member focus group. All focus groups will be audio recorded, and transcribed verbatim. A content analysis using an inductive open-coding approach will be used. To improve the dependability and trustworthiness of the analysis process, two members of the research team will remain embedded in the data and independently code the raw data. Member checking with two participants who are present in the study focus groups will also be completed to ensure credibility and meaning were captured appropriately.

Results

This study is currently underway. Preliminary results will be presented at NI2018 in a poster form.

Conclusions

It is anticipated that outcomes of this study will: 1) inform the various mental health patient portal implementations in the region where the study is taking place to improve the digital inclusion of mental health patients, and 2) result in the development of a list of patient-identified process and outcome indicators of mental health patient portal use to be used in subsequent evaluations. By understanding how patient portals can be best used by this population, and identifying patient-determined indicators of success, patient portals implemented in mental health settings may be sensitive to the needs of the population.

References

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