



PATIENT EDUCATION

Using the Intranet to Deliver Patient-Education Materials

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A key role of RNs in healthcare delivery is patient education. However, the time available for teaching in today's healthcare environment is limited because of patient needs, high acuity, shortened length of stays, and increased use of outpatient services (Hansen & Fisher, 1998; Lipetz, Bussigel, Bannerman, & Risley, 1990). Printed materials have been shown to increase patient satisfaction, reduce psychological distress, and increase knowledge and retention, and they often are used effectively to educate patients (Newell, Girgis, & Sanson-Fisher, 1995; Vetto, Dubois, & Vetto, 1996). Frustration mounts, however, when busy nurses encounter barriers while attempting to access teaching tools.

The outpatient oncology Peggy D. Cowdery Patient Care Center of the Nebraska Health System (NHS), an affiliate of the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha, is a fast-paced care-delivery setting that treated more than 44,000 patients in 2001. The nursing staff must have ready access to accurate and current patient-education materials. In the past, the main source for such information was preprinted instruction sheets. The sheets were bound together as tablets, and nurses tore off pages as needed. Depending on treatment regimen,

Patient education is a critical part of healthcare delivery. Many factors reduce the amount of time nurses can devote to patient teaching. One mode of patient teaching, the use of printed materials, is an efficient and effective way to deliver and reinforce patient education. However, several barriers are associated with the method, including outdated or exhausted supplies of stock materials, expenses related to developing and printing materials, limited storage space, and the inability to locate materials when needed. The authors identified the intranet, an internal network that operates within a larger World Wide Web site, as a potential solution to these barriers. The Outpatient Oncology Clinic and Treatment Center of the Nebraska Health System, a fast-paced care setting in Omaha, agreed to serve as the project pilot area to evaluate using the intranet to generate patient-education materials. Teaching sheets about medication and symptom management, created by the oncology staff, were the first patient-education materials to be made available on the intranet. Advantages of using the intranet for patient education include online storage, decreased costs, easy access, real-time updates and distribution, and unlimited supply availability.

each patient received one or several sheets as resources for self-care and monitoring of adverse drug effects.

Some barriers traditionally associated with this method were outdated or exhausted supplies of stock materials, expenses related to developing and printing materials, limited storage space, and the inability to locate materials when needed. Patient-education groups, comprised of educators and

staff nurses, expressed strong interest in removing some of the barriers. One proposal identified NHS's intranet as a potential mode of resource delivery. The intranet is an internal network that operates within the larger university World Wide Web site and functions essentially like the Internet, except that users must be authorized to obtain access to it. The main purpose of an intranet is to share an organization's information and resources among employees. Users can view an intranet site through a Web browser, but it is not part of the World Wide Web.

The Oncology-Hematology Service Line was chosen to pilot test the process of using the NHS intranet as a new mode of delivering patient-education information. An information technology (IT) representative, who also is an RN, was asked to create an intranet site to use for cataloging, storing, and updating educational materials that could be printed easily as needed at clinical sites on and off campus.

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