Theory-Based Patient Portal eLearning Program
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, SCHOOL OF NURSING

THE PURPOSE

To assess whether an older adult friendly patient portal eLearning program can help older adults use patient portals to better manage their health.

Name of Investigator | Eun-Shim Nahm, PhD, RN, FAAN

Name of Project | A Theory-Based Patient Portal eLearning Program for Older Adults with Chronic Illnesses

Study Sponsor | University of Maryland, School of Nursing

Total number of participants to-date | 272

Timeline of the project | 12 months

Funder | Agency for Research and Healthcare Quality

Target population | Older adults with chronic conditions

WHAT DID PEOPLE DO IF THEY WERE INVOLVED WITH THE PROJECT?

Participate in an online two-armed randomized controlled trial. The intervention group used an older adult-friendly Theory-based Patient portal eLearning Program (T-PeP) for three weeks right after randomization. The control group to support older adults had access to the intervention after completion of the study. All participants took three online surveys at baseline, 3 weeks, and 4 months.

WHAT DID PARTICIPANTS TAKE AWAY FROM THEIR INVOLVEMENT?

By participating in this study, participants learned important information about what the patient portal is, and how to use it to better manage their health. In addition, by sharing experience in using this program, they helped health professionals and researchers develop similar health web sites for older adults. Ultimately, this will benefit other older individuals.

WHAT ISSUES OR FINDINGS WERE DISCOVERED DURING THE PROJECT?

Finding: Trial is ongoing.

Preliminary findings from the analysis of baseline survey: A total of 272 older adults (mean age, 70.0 years) with chronic conditions were recruited from 29 states. The majority of participants (n=194, 71.3%) had at least one patient portal account, and 51.5% (n=100) had two or more patient portal accounts. The types of patient portals varied widely, including at least 38 different patient portals from various sources (e.g., hospitals, clinics, and pharmacies). A total of 170 participants provided comments about their experiences with patient portal education, including "no training/self-taught" (n=55) and "minimal information" (n=23). Overall, the perceived level of patient portal usability was low (mean, 28.7 [6–42]). Participants most frequently used patient portals to view lab results and e-messages from their providers. Patient portals can benefit older adults managing chronic condition and many older adults are using patient portals but in a limited way.

Application for senior living professionals: There has been a rapid growth in the number of older adults online and patient portals can be a robust tool to engage older adults in their own care. To do so, patient portals must be easily manageable by these individuals and sufficient training must be provided. Further studies with different groups of older adults will provide additional information to develop more usable patient portals for older adults.

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WHAT ARE FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTNERSHIPS?

During recruitment, we found that many residents wished to know more about patient portals but worried about their computer skills. Some residents stated that they use health services in Integrace but the organization does not use patient portals yet. We can consider a few collaboration opportunities with Integrace and other senior living providers:

a. Research opportunities: We are preparing our next R0I study based on the current R2I study. We hope to collaborate with Integrace and other senior living providers for this project.

b. Educational opportunities: Offering computer classes with different levels of content or topics, such as fundamental, health information resources, patient portals, etc.

c. Practice opportunities: When Integrace or other senior living providers implement patient portals, our team would be happy to assist in implementation and education of residents.