

## A New Era for DM

### Personal Health Support Approach Supports Patient-Centered Medical Home Model

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**"A**m I on the right medicines?"..." Have I had all the tests that I need?"..."Am I at risk for any complications?"..."How should I exercise?"..."What diet should I follow?"..."Are my children at risk?" These and dozens of other questions about wellness, prevention and treatment regularly run through the minds of the 125 million Americans who have a chronic illness, such as heart disease, diabetes, asthma or high blood pressure.

Physicians are the most frequently sought source of information, but studies have shown they often fall short in teaching skills, lack the confidence they can provide adequate guidance and commonly feel they do not receive adequate reimbursement for preventive counseling (1, 2). As a result, patients may ask friends for advice, read lay magazines, turn to internet searches, or rely on any one of dozens of media outlets (3). Unfortunately, the accuracy of this information can be uncertain. Even highly regarded television news channels have added to the considerable glut of misinformation (4).

Enter *personal health support*. This is an extra layer of care specifically developed to give patients with chronic illnesses access to personalized, evidence-based and up-to-date health coaching that helps them better manage their health status based on their own preferences, goals and readiness to change. Moving away from standardized

interventions, the personal health support approach allows patients to decide what behavior modifications they feel ready to address, giving them more power and incentive to become involved in their own care. The idea is that by focusing on information personally relevant to each patient, the chances for patient interest, engagement and success with behavior modification increase. As the patients' confidence grows, the support can evolve and enable them to pursue more rigorous health targets, resulting in improved health.

Combined with computerized decision and individualized support based on the needs of each patient, personal health support coaching is designed to cut through the health information clutter and help patients fully understand the risks, benefits and alternatives of various treatment options.

While personal health support was initially designed to be telephonically delivered by nurse coaches, it is rapidly evolving. Not only can it be given in person, but is also available on an ongoing basis via web-based chat, email and texting. In addition, thanks to care guidelines programmed into care management systems that appear on the screen each time when health coaches interact with patients, the support can be delivered by a spectrum of non-physician health care professionals, including nurses, pharmacists, respiratory therapists, health counselors and medical educators.

Thanks to the decade-long development of increasingly robust information databases, it is now possible to tailor the coaching to assure that the insurance benefit is used to the maximum well being of the enrollees. Personal health support is also backed by principles of industrial psychology, augmented by not being limited to any single communication channel, linked to home monitoring devices and accessible via the electronic health record. Finally, patients are routinely encouraged to discuss their personal health support advice with their physicians.

### **PHS Supports Patient-Centered Medical Home Model of Care**

Personal health support is also a key component of the growing patient-centered medical home (PCMH) movement. While the PCMH is just getting underway, preliminary information from a variety of clinical settings, such as integrated delivery systems and publically-supported clinics, show the PCMH not only can have a beneficial impact on clinical outcomes but can also optimize health care costs. Thanks to a variety of health insurer sponsored pilot programs, the PCMH is currently being disseminated to other care settings, including smaller independent physician-owned practices. It is also likely that the PCMH will be included as a component of federally sponsored health care reform (5).

Since the transition of primary care practices to PCMHs will require considerable effort, including the hiring and training of additional personnel, the DMAA, The Care Continuum Alliance, has advocated for a combined approach between traditional disease management and the PCMH (6).

This includes disease management organization (DMO) sponsored personal health support resources for primary care sites that have not adopted the principles of the PCMH in their day-to-day clinical practice.

This combined approach can occur in multiple ways, including:

**Physician Support:** providing access to personal health support services that meet patient-centered medical home standards of care for physicians who do not have the resources to satisfy the criteria for PCMH certification or for practices that would like the convenience of outsourced support.

**Network Access:** offering personal health support in employer or health plan populations where some patients may have patchy access to the PCMH. This is important because some primary care sites may elect not to incorporate one or more of the domains of the PCMH, including patient coaching.

**Collaborative Relationships:** providing remote personal health support services for a segment of a PCMH-enabled primary care site's panel of patients, such as those with a lower burden of disease. In contrast, patients with more complex care needs can be helped on a face-to-face basis by the PCMH team members.

In all of these arrangements, DMOs offering personal health support can become *virtual* members of the PCMH team. Increasingly sophisticated health information technology with compatible data exchange can enable remotely positioned nurses to significantly increase a primary care site's effectiveness.

Patients with chronic illness are being confronted by a myriad of treatment options.

Personal health support can help and is a key ingredient that assists individuals in

getting the right care at the right time. It is an important part of the PCMH and can be provided by the members of an increasingly sophisticated health care team.

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