Mitigating the Societal Costs of Poor Coordination of Health Care Through Improved Electronic Health Record Communication

Eric Gish, D.O.
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Abstract

The cost of health care in the United States continues to rise without apparent limitations. The most recent World Health Organization statistics demonstrate the US currently spends 17.6% of the gross domestic product on health care - $2.6 trillion - the highest of any industrialized nation in the world. One culprit suggested to play a significant role in high costs is a fragmented health care system. Diminished patient clinical outcomes, increased medical errors, unnecessary medical exams and treatment, delays in medical care, and an increase in the practice of defensive medicine are symptomatic of a healthcare delivery system with poor coordination of patient care.

Electronic health records (EHRs) have not been fully implemented by healthcare providers. Concerns regarding the cost of implementation, user friendliness, incompatibility between proprietary system platforms, and perceived diminished productivity overshadow the perceived benefits of health outcomes monitoring, preventative care reminders, and ease of recalling pertinent information within the medical record.

Better coordination of care via electronic health records could reduce the cost burden of healthcare. EHRs can improve access to health care information, help reduce duplication of unnecessary testing, and improve communication between providers – all of which lead to improved coordination of care and decreased expense to the medical system. However, interoperability between EHR systems, or the ability to communicate electronically across proprietary software platforms, is imperative to fully maximize the utility of these systems.