

Asthma Community Network – Conversations for Advancing Action Podcast Series

Episode Transcript

Episode 4 – Health Information Technology

Narrator: Welcome to “Asthma Community Network – Conversations for Advancing Action” –a podcast series from AsthmaCommunityNetwork.org - an online Network designed for people committed to improving asthma outcomes in their community. This podcast series is designed to share best practices for reducing the impact of asthma through delivery of comprehensive, community-based care, especially in underserved communities. In these podcasts you’ll learn about strategies for managing effective program delivery systems, addressing environmental triggers, and leveraging community assets through partnerships.

Today’s topic is health information technology; commonly known as health IT

Anna Gard: There’s constant development of patient-centric tools to support asthma self-management and promote engagement with clinicians, patients and families to assist in identifying, reporting their asthma triggers, monitoring their asthma status, supporting self-care and management strategies.

Some of these tools and technologies really help (A) engage our patient and (B) provide us with additional data to improve our management of patients.

Narrator: That’s Anna Gard, the Health IT and Quality Consultant at the Association of Clinicians for the Underserved.

Anna and her colleague, Lois Wessel, Associate Director for Programs at the Association of Clinicians for the Underserved, join us today to talk about health IT.

The ACU is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to support clinicians who work with the underserved. They provide training, tools, resources and expertise to assist those who are working to improve the health of underserved populations.

The use of health IT can improve the quality of and access to affordable health care. Health IT can also prevent medical errors, reduce health care costs and increase administrative efficiencies.

In fact, Health IT can be a prime method of communication to engage patients in underserved communities. Underserved communities are increasingly relying on SmartPhones to access the internet.

Anna, how are these communities using mobile technology?

Anna Gard: We do know that mobile technology provides outreach and access to patients irrespective of socio-economic status, race, ethnicity or geographic location.

Mobile phone access for minority and lower socio-economic populations has been reported 79 percent of Medicaid recipients, 83 percent of African American adults and 79 percent of Hispanics and 68

percent of whites use text messaging. So text messaging is a wonderful way to engage patients and to do outreach.

Narrator: Anna, how can patients from underserved communities benefit from Health IT tools?

Anna Gard: We really look at health information technology as a tool to empower our consumers to be engaged partners in their health care.

For example, patient portals are an ideal way to give patients access to the elements of their electronic medical record; including, their labs, their allergies and medication lists.

And the patient portals can provide access to targeted multi-media, low literacy, multi-lingual educational materials for patients to access, rather than doing blind searches on the internet. It also can be a place where they can access community resources, like legal aid, housing assistance or medication assistance programs.

Narrator: Lois, how can health IT address language and cultural barriers?

Lois Wessel: In addition to what Anna already touched on, through technology we can really address some of the issues of language and culture and literacy in a way that we may never have been able to do with something that’s written. I would say, if you can’t read, no matter how low literate something is, you still can’t read it.

So if you can think about those kind of patient education things, which typically we’ve been giving out to patients in a written format, and changing that to some kind of video format or an App that will walk them through that, that can be pushed to the patient through a patient portal in Spanish, in Chinese, in sign language for the patient so they have a little more education before the provider comes in. And that makes it more meaningful for the patient because things are being addressed in a language and at a level that they can understand.

Narrator: Anna, can you provide an example of an App that could help people with low literacy improve their ability to manage their asthma?

Anna Gard: One in particular I’d like to mention, it’s called Assist Me with Inhalers, and it has an audio system, which is very good for people who are unable to read or at least have low health literacy. And it’s an audio system that prompts you to take your medication, and it prompts you to follow the correct steps while inhaling.

Narrator: Health IT also provides new opportunities to improve the quality of healthcare management.

Anna, how can healthcare providers and healthcare practitioners benefit from Health IT?

Anna Gard: Health IT can also be a powerful tool for population management strategies. It aids in identifying high risk patients in certain disease, with certain disease processes. And that enables the healthcare system and healthcare team to direct more intensive and targeted resources towards that population.

Narrator: Anna, can you provide an example of an App that could be used to improve healthcare management?

Anna Gard: There’s some really neat, geomapping software that has been used in other health centers that helps display asthma incidence correlation to pollution, housing, emergency room visits. There’s a geomapping software called “Asthmapolis”, which is attached to a rescue inhaler and it collects data on the inhaler use, the time and the location, and that data is downloadable to the patient’s electronic health record as well as to the personal health record and it gives both the patient and provider data to understand where is the patient and what are they doing when they are experiencing asthma exacerbations.

Narrator: Finally Anna, do you have any advice on what healthcare providers should consider before incorporating health IT into their patient engagement?

Anna Gard: Yes. It’s really easy to get very excited about new technology and we jump into using it before we think about the repercussion of sharing our personal health information and so it’s really important for both the consumers, the patients, and clinicians to be educated on security and privacy issues related to health information technology.

There’s a lot of resources available specific to health information technology and privacy and security, the Office of the National Coordinator Health IT’s website has an entire section on privacy and security with tools and resources.

Narrator: Thank you for joining us today!

For additional Health IT resources and to hear other podcasts in this series, visit asthmacommunitynetwork.org/podcasts.

And for more information on asthma management, go to AsthmaCommunityNetwork.org – an online Network for people committed to improving asthma outcomes in their community.