Overview

The need
UNC REX Healthcare sought to increase the quality of its post-discharge care instructions to improve patient outcomes and satisfaction.

The solution
The health system used IBM® Micromedex® Medication Essential Fact Sheets to offer clear, concise education regarding proper use of medications.

The benefit
The organization improved its patient satisfaction scores on key HCAHPS metrics that evaluate how well hospitals explain medications and side effects upon patient discharge, and early evidence suggests an observable decline in patient readmissions.

Searching for better patient education

UNC REX Healthcare

Improving patient engagement and HCAHPS scores through better medication education

UNC REX Healthcare, a member of UNC Health Care, is a private, not-for-profit health system with multiple facilities located throughout the state of North Carolina.

UNC REX has more than 5,400 staff members, including over 1,100 physicians and 1,700 nurses. With so many employees, Julia Aucoin, Director of Practice, Quality and Research, knew that high-quality patient communication was a critical factor in the health system's overall performance.
Using scores from the organization’s Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) survey as a barometer, Aucoin pinpointed one of the biggest opportunities for improvement — better patient education on medications and side effects. But she wasn’t sure how to provide it in a quick, consistent and cost-efficient manner.

“Medication teaching is essential to patient success, and that teaching is measured by HCAHPS scores,” Aucoin said. “Because of that, we wanted to find a solution that would allow our staff to do the teaching at the optimal moment the patient was most receptive and engaged with the information.” While electronic health records at UNC REX had previously provided patients with a degree of post-discharge care information, the lengthy format and technical language made the sheets hard to understand for some.

“We have medication information built into our electronic health records, but those directions print out in five pages. That makes it difficult for the patient to focus on what information is important,” she explained.

Aucoin tried to amend the situation in-house. “We had created our own medication cards that were simple and instructive, and they were very well received,” she said. “But the time required to build those cards was onerous. Each card required roughly 20 man hours to create, and it became infeasible for us to do on a continuing basis.”

Finding the right source of information

The UNC REX team reached out to Truven Health Analytics®, acquired by IBM in 2016 and now part of the IBM Watson Health™ business, which offered a complimentary trial of its Micromedex Medication Essential Fact Sheets. These brief, easy-to-read handouts help patients understand the medication they’ve been prescribed, including how to take it, why they need it and what potential side effects were possible.

Aucoin immediately recognized the educational and financial benefits the fact sheets could provide.
“Micromedex Medication Essential Fact Sheets met all the criteria for being simple, accessible and easy to use at the right time,” she said. “Not only is the one-page layout quick to physically print, but the ability to pre-print allows our staff to prepare a patient for a timely discharge, all at a substantial cost-savings.”

Improving outcomes and readmissions

With the improved patient education and engagement facilitated by Micromedex Medication Essential Fact Sheets, Aucoin and her team at UNC REX now have an efficient tool to help them achieve better patient outcomes and lower readmission rates.

“Our staff tell me that our patients, especially with chronic conditions such as heart failure, are coming back less often because they understand the medication they have been given,” Aucoin explained. “For example, with a heart medication that has a side effect of frequent urination, the patient has been told and understands that it’s happening because the medicine is pulling excess fluid from around the heart, and moving it through the body. They don’t have to come back to make sure it’s normal.”

This has also been reflected in UNC REX’s satisfaction scores. “We’ve seen a major improvement on patient satisfaction scores in the teaching of medication and side effects categories. Our last HCAHPS score saw us score up into the 86th percentile, and we had been as low as the 65th percentile back in January,” Aucoin said. “We are very intentional about engaging with our patients so that they feel welcome while they’re in their most vulnerable state. Hospitals are trying to help people become healthier, and Micromedex Medication Essential Fact Sheets helps us to achieve that mission.”
About IBM Watson Health

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For more information on IBM Watson Health, visit ibm.com/watsonhealth.

Solution components

- IBM® Micromedex® Patient Connect
- IBM® Micromedex® Medication Essential Fact Sheets
- IBM® Micromedex® CareNotes
- IBM® Micromedex® Consumer Education with SmartEngage

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