Mayo Clinic Experience Providing Specialist Consultation via Electronic Communication

Objective:
Mayo Clinic has initiated a number of practice redesign initiatives in the outpatient setting with the objective of reducing cost per episode of care, and compressing the length of time needed to complete an episode of care so that Mayo can provide access to those patients with complex medical conditions needing face-to-face consultation. Mayo also has a strategic objective to share unique expertise and knowledge with a network of external affiliate practices. A goal of both objectives is to improve patient and referring provider satisfaction. This abstract describes how Mayo Clinic developed an electronic healthcare model to provide consultations (eConsults) to both Mayo Clinic and affiliated practice providers. An eConsult is a non-visit electronic consultation between a requesting provider and a Mayo Clinic specialist using a secure, online portal. Medical information and diagnostic testing are electronically made available for the specialist to review. The specialist’s opinion is transmitted back to the requestor within two business days.

Planning Methods:
The eConsult concept was prototyped at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN by Mayo’s Center for Innovation. The focus was on offering asynchronous, electronic medical specialty (cardiology, gastroenterology, pulmonary) consultation to Department of Medicine physicians instead of scheduling a traditional face-to-face visit. The pilot demonstrated an opportunity to reduce the cost to care for Mayo Clinic’s established patient population and redirect physician time to more complex patients. The concept was advanced to the Mayo Clinic eHealth Operations team for implementation across the outpatient practice at Mayo Clinic sites in Rochester, Florida and Arizona. The eConsult service is limited to asynchronous, electronic interactions. The Mayo Clinic electronic medical record (EMR) and the Mayo Clinic Referring Physician Portal are the approved tools for secure store and forward transmission of medical documentation and images pertinent to the requestors’ clinical question. Mayo Clinic develops clinical tools for the internal Mayo practice (in-house) before offering the service to external affiliates and after nine months of experience with Mayo’s outpatient practice, the eConsult service was released to providers at external affiliate sites.

Implementation Methods:
A project charter was drafted to define strategic alignment, business need, scope, key stakeholders and metrics of success. The project was approved for funding by the Mayo Clinic Practice Committee for planning and discovery. Policies outlining definitions and expectations for state medical licensure, EMR documentation, service standards, etc. were developed. An internal communication plan was launched using the ADKAR change management model for physicians and referring physician office staff, appointment coordinators and clinical allied health staff. Training and technical support was provided to affiliate sites. The planning team was comprised of a project manager, business analyst, clinical practice support, and other key stakeholders (finance, appointment scheduling, etc.). eConsults were launched in Rochester and planning was started for Mayo Clinic sites in Arizona and Florida. During discovery, a number of operational challenges were encountered as existing clinical and financial systems and processes were modified to accommodate scheduling and accounting for virtual patient care.

Results:
Thirty-eight hundred eConsults were provided by Mayo Clinic in Rochester in 2011. Ninety-seven percent of the consultations were requested by Mayo Clinic providers and the remainder by affiliated providers. Five percent of the affiliate eConsults resulted in a patient referral to Mayo Clinic. eConsults will be offered by Mayo Clinic in Arizona and Florida in January, 2012. Additional knowledge services have been made available to affiliated providers to enhance their access to Mayo Clinic expertise. To this date, additional work flows are being developed as the breadth and depth of the eConsult model for external affiliates matures. The eHealth team anticipates demand for synchronous (video) eConsults by both Mayo and affiliate providers in the near future. Adaptation of existing clinical and financial systems and processes continue to pose barriers to streamline workflows.

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