

ePrescribing

A True Lifesaver

Imagine that you go to Wal-Mart to make a purchase. In order for your check to clear, Wal-Mart has to call your bank and tell them what you are buying. Then a person at the bank writes down your order and the amount charged and posts it by hand into your account at the bank.

On another day, a Wal-Mart employee writes down what you bought and the amount and you take it by hand to the bank. Once you get to the bank the teller has to read and copy the handwritten purchase and the amount paid and post it by hand.

Now imagine this happening 10,000 times. Do you think there might be some mistakes? And how much time will all of this take?

In the case of pharmacies this is the system we are currently using most of the time. Pharmacies have to use handwritten or verbal orders from the prescribing provider. In the United States the odds of someone in your family having some sort of medical error over a two year period is one in three. Both patients and physicians agree on this number. One of the main reasons for medical errors relates to the difficulties with pharmacy orders.

Here are some common issues:

Imagine having to read handwriting or get these drugs correctly communicated over the phone:

Triethanolamine, Trifluoperazine, Trihexyphenidyl, Trimethoprim

Imagine trying to get these measurements right every time:

Mg, mcg, b.i.d., t.i.d

Imagine trying to make sure every time a prescription is ordered that it is included in the pharmacy benefits of your insurance carrier.

As you no doubt have experienced, different insurance companies will only pay for certain drugs. There are so many insurance carriers it is impossible for your provider to keep up with it all. And the carriers keep changing what they will pay for. As a result, pharmacies and providers spend a huge amount of time and dollars calling one another to get you the medication you need when it is not in the standard pharmacy list for your insurance carrier.

So, what is the answer to all of this?

Eprescribing has proven to be a very valuable way to increase patient safety and to make the health care system more efficient. In ePrescribing, the provider uses a computer and selects the drugs from a list where the spellings are always right and the dosage amounts and frequency which are always matched to the particular drug. In many systems the drugs are also matched to the disease or condition the provider is treating. So it is almost impossible to designate the wrong medication. And in many cases the insurance company makes the specific medication approvals available on line so that the right drug is selected for approval for that insurance carrier.

Once the provider makes their drug choice, they can send the electronic copy of the eprescribing to the pharmacy, fax it (if the pharmacy is not set up yet to receive eprescribing), or simply print it out for you to take to your pharmacy. Once the prescription arrives at the pharmacy, the drugs, dosages, and approvals are already incorporated. Because the original prescription and the way the pharmacy gets the order are correct as to dosage and spelling the chance of errors goes significantly down.

The system which the partners are building from the AHRQ project will automatically provide eprescribing. Many of the local private providers in Cherokee county (outside of the partner agencies) will also be offered the capability to have eprescribing as well.

Eprescribing is one thing we can all do to make our healthcare system safer, improve quality, and lower costs by being more efficient with our time.

NEXT TIME: All about privacy and electronic data exchange