POLICY BRIEF

Consumer health informatics: improving patient engagement

Translational Behavioral Medicine

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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Healthcare providers and public health practitioners should consider CHI tools and applications within the legitimate scope of health promotion, medical care and clinical practice.
2. The statutory authority to monitor and enforce the safe and appropriate development and marketing of these tools, devices and applications should be clarified.
3. HHS should require uniform reporting standards to enable meaningful product comparison for quality assurance and outcomes evaluation.

RESEARCH AND PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Training, education, and continuing medical education opportunities should be provided for future and current medical and public health professionals regarding the potential emerging benefits and consumer demand for CHI tools.
2. The NIH, CDC, AHRQ, and HRSA should support research to further evaluate the potential benefits, costs and harms associated with CHI tools.

What is Consumer Health Informatics (CHI)?

*Any electronic tool, technology, or system that is designed to interact with consumers.

*It includes tailored information or recommendations.

*Consumers may use it with a healthcare professional or by themselves.

*Examples of applications include disease management, lifestyle management, tracking observations of daily living, health promotion, self-care, and care-giving.

Why is CHI important for healthcare and health promotion?

It is estimated that 10 million people search for health-related information on the internet each day. In particular, consumers are drawn to convenient and anonymous technologies for help them manage their health. Examples of CHI applications include smoking cessation, physical activity, nutrition, as well as management of diseases such as asthma and breast cancer. CHI has potential as a tool to enhance health promotion and provide a way for healthcare professionals to increase patient engagement.

Is CHI effective?

After a Systematic Evidence Review, researchers found that CHI applications may engage consumers, enhance select traditional clinical interventions, and improve both intermediate and clinical outcomes. There is also evidence to support that individual tailoring, personalization, and behavioral feedback are effective CHI tools. Most of the current research evaluated the impact of CHI on behavioral outcomes; CHI has proved particularly found to be effective for smoking cessation. For clinical outcomes, evidence appears strongest for the use of CHI on mental health outcomes. There is not enough evidence to make conclusions on economic outcomes of CHI.

BOTTOM LINE:

The body of available scientific evidence suggests that CHI applications hold significant promise for improving outcomes across a variety of diseases and health issues, but more research and evaluation is needed.