Payers begin to offer incentives for user's digital health data

Health plans need digital health data. That is a given.

With such massive, diverse member populations, payers have realized they can no longer rely on simply averaging data from their independent information systems to affect cost and quality of care. They need a more personalized approach to help their members and have found a way to do so with provider-and patient-reported digital health data. By incorporating this data into a centralized repository, payers can analyze and use this information to create and improve their various member services. For example, in addition to supporting patient-specific care-management models, integrated data could enable the creation of wellness programs, preventive or disease-management care initiatives or even health-coaching programs. This personalized data can go beyond incentivizing and motivating healthy lifestyles; it can also help payers increase member engagement, a critical objective for many health plan providers.

Some obstacles that may have prevented payers from using digital health data in the past have recently been broken down. For example, some technology companies now offer a "one-to-many" cloud-based data-integration platform that enables providers and patients to input digital health data through disparate wearables, applications and devices. This enables payers to then access and analyze the data via a singular, integrated platform. Legislative changes have also helped break down barriers. For example, the benefits of using digital health data in healthcare are explicitly highlighted in the Affordable Care Act and in recent updates to Medicare reimbursement rules.

However, despite these advancements, health plans have realized that they also need providers and patients to buy-in for the information to be robust enough to be analyzed and used for improved patient care.

So, just as providers have been financially incentivized to use various technologies in their practice, payers now are monetarily rewarding them for integrating digital health data. For example,

financial incentives, such as bonuses, preferred pricing and tiered models are common health-plan tactics to help drive providers toward incorporating digital health data into their practice. Further, payers also are offering financial rewards to providers for utilizing such technologies as high-speed networks and large data repositories, as these would enable ease of digital data collection and sharing.

Health plans can now collaborate with providers to incorporate patient information into a central source of aggregate clinical data, biometric data and other data. Such information can be used to not only improve care and lower costs, but also to create health information exchanges, and offer further clinical analytics.

Health plans also are using financial incentives to attract their members to joining digital health data programs. The carrot approach for members includes offers of cash, gift cards, premium reductions or other merchandise for using various devices, applications or other programs to record their health data. Such financial incentives can encourage members to take ownership of their healthcare by engaging in digital health data programs.

And in return, health plans offer their members a consumer/member-friendly dashboard that contains more robust analytics and insights into their general and specific health trends over time, predictive analysis and other programs in the hopes that they will continue to be engaged in their care—and in using digital health data technologies.

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