EMR Helps Target Smokers When Hospitalized

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WASHINGTON — Adding a smoking cessation component to electronic medical record systems improves the likelihood that hospitalized individuals with a history of smoking will receive cessation counseling, according to study results presented at a conference sponsored by the National Patient Safety Foundation.

Because hospitalization forces patients to temporarily abstain from smoking, identifying smokers when they are hospitalized with other illnesses may help them quit, Dr. Vikram Verma wrote in a poster.

Dr. Verma and colleagues at Kings County Hospital Center in Brooklyn, N.Y., reviewed 420 patient charts during the 6-month period prior to adding a smoking cessation component to the electronic medical record (EMR). The researchers identified 62 smokers (15%). Of these, 24 (39%) received nicotine replacement therapy and 29 patients refused NRT. For the other nine, the smoking cessation issue remained unaddressed.

The EMR included a mandatory "tobacco evaluation" field to guarantee that the smoking status was assessed in all patients. In addition, an electronic reminder to prescribe transdermal NRT appears in the records of all patients who smoke, and any patients who are "positive" in the smoking history field are automatically referred to a smoking cessation counselor.

During the 6-month period after adding the smoking cessation field to the EMR, the researchers identified 85 smokers when they reviewed another 420 patient charts. The issue of smoking cessation was addressed in 100% of those patients, although 65 (76%) refused NRT.

"The program facilitated our efforts in providing smoking cessation counseling," the researchers said. Also, adding smoking status to the EMR may help with long-term studies of patients' smoking status. ■