

User testing and performance evaluation of the Electronic Quality Improvement Platform for Plans and Pharmacies

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Abstract

Objective: To user-test and evaluate a performance information management platform that makes standardized, benchmarked medication use quality data available to both health plans and community pharmacy organizations.

Setting: Multiple health/drug plans and multiple chain and independent pharmacies across the United States.

Evaluation: During the first phase of the study, user experience was measured via user satisfaction surveys and interviews with key personnel (pharmacists, pharmacy leaders, and health plan leadership). Improvements were subsequently made to the platform based on these findings. During the second phase of the study, the platform was implemented in a greater number of pharmacies and by a greater number of payers. User experience was then reevaluated to gather information for further improvements.

Results: The surveys and interviews revealed that users found the Web-based platform easy to use and beneficial in terms of understanding and comparing performance metrics. Primary concerns included lack of access to real-time data and patient-specific data. Many users also expressed uncertainty as to how they could use the information and data provided by the platform.

Conclusion: The study findings indicate that while information management platforms can be used effectively in both pharmacy and health plan settings, future development is needed to ensure that the provided data can be transferred to pharmacy best practices and improved quality care.

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With passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), it has become increasingly important to improve quality of care while simultaneously reducing health care costs.¹ One way to accomplish this two-part goal is to improve medication adherence in patients with chronic disease. Medication nonadherence can lead to adverse health outcomes such as disease progression and increased hospital readmissions, which in turn can lead to unnecessary medical costs of up to \$100 billion per year in the United States.² Medication adherence has therefore become a key outcome that both payers and providers are interested in measuring.

One key proponent of an increased focus on medication adherence is the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). To address this issue, CMS developed the Medicare Part D Star Ratings system for Medicare Advantage and standalone prescription drug plan sponsors, which comprises various quality metrics.³ For the 2016 plan year, 3 of the 15 Part D Star Ratings qual-

ity measures are indirectly related to medication adherence, while 4 of the measures are directly related to adherence:

- Use of high-risk medication by plan members when safer drug choices were available
- Adherence to diabetes medications
- Adherence to hypertension medications
- Adherence to cholesterol medications⁴

These measures quantify adherence as proportion of days covered (PDC), which is calculated based on fill dates and days' supply of medications.⁵ Health care providers, professionals, and researchers are now devoting more time, effort, and resources to developing interventions and strategies that improve medication adherence and health outcomes while reducing health care costs.

Pharmacists are one group of health professionals that has the potential to improve medication adherence and its associated measures. Studies have shown that community pharmacists' provision of direct patient care can lead to improved patient outcomes and reduced health care costs.^{6,7} Pharmacy care has also been associated with improved patient outcomes in accountable care organizations and patient-centered medical homes.⁸

The increased prevalence of pharmacy's involvement with quality-focused collaborative care models, risk-sharing care models, and value-based incentive programs increases the need for pharmacists to be aware of and understand quality improvement measures. Therefore, pharmacists' continued development of innovative tools and methods for understanding and staying apprised of quality measures such as medication adherence will be crucial to achieving the goals of the ACA, as well as the "triple aim" of better health, care, and cost.

Previous studies have shown that the use of information technology such as electronic health records is critical to the health care industry and that information management is essential to increasing the quality and delivery of care.⁹⁻¹¹ While there are several information technology tools available to help health care providers increase medication safety and reduce error, few to no such tools have been developed for practicing pharmacists, especially those focused on helping pharmacists follow and understand relevant quality performance metrics.^{9,12} Pharmacists who can use technology to better understand quality metrics will be better prepared to implement strategies and approaches that lead to improved performance outcomes, delivery of care, and quality of care.

The present study used a two-phase approach to evaluating pharmacist user experience with the Electronic Quality Improvement Platform for Plans and Pharmacies (EQuIPP), an application offered by Pharmacy Quality Solutions (PQS). EQuIPP is a performance management service delivered via a Web-based

Key Points

Background:

- With passage of the Affordable Care Act, there has been increased emphasis on improving the quality of U.S. health care while reducing its cost.
- Pharmacy organizations and health plans can help improve patients' medication adherence and partners' Medicare Star Ratings metrics, but there are limited ways to access, understand, and track this information.
- The Electronic Quality Improvement Platform for Plans and Pharmacies (EQuIPP) was developed to provide pharmacies with a comprehensive and standardized platform for performance reporting and to provide pharmacists with the ability to implement and evaluate interventions to improve patients' pharmacy-related outcomes.

Findings:

- Overall feedback from platform users was positive, with survey respondents and interviewees saying they found the platform easy to use and beneficial in terms of understanding adherence quality metrics.
- Among users' primary concerns with the platform was the need for more patient-specific data to help pharmacists develop targeted adherence improvement interventions.
- Participants also cited the need for continuous, real-time data updates and an increased number and variety of users to ensure the platform's utility in a pharmacy setting.

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