

Patient portals create capacity, says Health Care Home expert



Patient portals are just one part of the Health Care Home (HCH) programme but they are a key to giving patients and practices more options, says Hamilton GP John Morgan.

“Once patients are using portals, you see real benefits in time and capacity,” says Dr Morgan, a GP with NorthCare Pukete Road practice, a part of Pinnacle Midlands Health Network and a Health Care Home practice since 2011.

Launched in the Southern district in July, HCH is a patient-centred model of general practice care. The HCH model promotes better ways for patients to access their general practice, including pathways for same day access and usual care, and more options for patients with high needs, all with a focus on better business operations.

Dr Morgan presented about patient portal to a group of Southern district practice managers, administrators, nurses and GPs recently and participated in a WellSouth - Southern DHB workshop for practices in Otago and Southland enrolled in the Health Care Home programme.

He said practice staff should use every opportunity to promote the uptake and use of patient portals, including at reception, via their websites, with email signatures, through any correspondence and at the close of appointments. Practices should also designate 'portal champions' and set targets for portal uptake.

“It is a slow burn but it pays off,” he says.

While easier access to test results, the ability to book appointments online, and repeat prescriptions are initial draw cards for patients to use the portals, there are other features and functions that should be 'switched-on' to encourage use, including viewing notes and secure messages between patients and GPs.

Further down the road, other options may include video consultation and the potential for patients to submit health measurements from fitness trackers.

“For patients, the portals support better continuity of care and it helps to get them more engaged in managing their own health and well-being,” Dr Morgan says.

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