

Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

Patient Engagement: ONC's New Playbook Offers Guidelines for Your Patient Portal Launch

Patient engagement will be key as ACI initiatives go into action next year.

As the initial performance period of MACRA's Merit-Based Payment Incentive System (MIPS) performance plan—Advancing Care Information (ACI)—draws near, more and more providers will be forced to take inventory of their current patient interaction strategies. With a shift toward a patient-focused system where your pay will be dependent on the quality of the care you administer, there's never been a better time to improve your online patient communications.

Background: MIPS aims to put quality first with a pay-for-performance type model starting Jan. 1, 2017. ACI is set to replace Meaningful Use as part of this Medicare payment overhaul. It is one of four parts of MIPS and primarily concerns the EHR and technological side of the program.

This past April, the ONC coordinated with the MACRA regulations and compiled a report for Congress that suggested more needed to be done to provide the healthcare industry with user-friendly, interoperable, and affordable EHRs. The ONC's eventual goal remains to help providers find the best software for each particular practice, designing tools and engaging EHR vendors to guide practitioners through the process to better serve their patients.

"As part of our efforts to provide tools and resources to help healthcare providers, we are excited to release the Patient Engagement Playbook for Providers," said **Thomas A. Mason, MD**, Chief Medical Officer of the ONC, in a Health IT Buzz blog post on June 2. "An online tool for doctors, nurses, other clinicians, practice staff, hospital administrators and others who wish to leverage health IT to actively engage patients in their health and care."

Enact These First Steps

What is the Patient Engagement Playbook? Released by the ONC at its 2016 Annual Meeting, the playbook combines four components to assist providers with the development and implementation of patient portals. ONC is calling this its "first phase" and hopes that the chapters of this resource will be a guideline for providers to follow when setting up or revamping gateways to exchange information and dialogue with patients.

Content and data: The Patient Engagement Playbook's four areas concentrate specifically on the setup and maintenance of patient portals. Here is a quick description of the offerings:

- Advice on the initial enrollment of patients in a practice portal
- Suggestions about what your patient portal should include
- Explanations about HIPAA guidelines in reference to portals, vendors, and partners
- "How and why to track patient generated health data"

"Why a 'playbook?' Playbooks aren't just static instruction manuals—they're constantly-evolving sets of strategies and approaches," explains Mason, "Successful coaches update their playbooks regularly, and each iteration reflects new, innovative solutions to shifting circumstances."

Look for future additions: The ONC says that this is just the beginning and a small part of a larger IT plan, which will be added to as the year progresses.

Resource: For the complete Patient Engagement Playbook for Providers from the ONC, visit <https://www.healthit.gov/playbook/pe/>.

For a closer look at Thomas A. Mason's Health IT Buzz blog post, visit <https://www.healthit.gov/buzz-blog/consumer/playbooks-arent-just-sports-teams-helping-providers-patients-work-together-health/>.