

# Pain Management Coding Alert

## Reader Question: Put Focus on Patient with Digital Coms

**Question:** We want to improve our practice website so it's easier for our current patients to use and more engaging for potential new patients. Where do we start?

Delaware Subscriber

**Answer:** If you want to make sure your patients use your practice's website or portal to make appointments, check in on lab results, or pay bills, you need to make sure your technology is appealing, accessible, and usable, say **Stacy Robison, MPH, MCHES**, and **Sandy Hilfiker, MA**, of CommunicateHealth.

Speaking at this year's Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society conference, Robison and Hilfiker noted that currently, "the health community is really designing for health systems, not just for patients. But that's starting to change [because] patients are going to demand a better user experience. If you have an easy-to-use interface, that's going to be a huge differentiator."

What follows are tips from Robison and Hilfiker for a digital presence that sets the stage for good patient communication and excellent patient engagement.

**Write clear, actionable content.** You have seven seconds to grab a user's attention on your web site, they stress, so make sure you answer users' questions, and help them to complete tasks and to make decisions. Don't make them toggle back and forth between pages to do what they need to do. On every page, give them the most important information first and spell out what actions they need to take.

For example, instead of noting that "asthma makes breathing difficult for more than 34 million Americans," dispense with abstract statistics and cut straight to actionable patient-centered steps such as "If someone in your family has asthma, start by getting rid of these common cause of attacks: mold or dampness, cockroaches, and secondhand smoke," Robison and Hilfiker suggest.

**Display content clearly.** Use short paragraphs and bulleted lists. Use readable font that's at least 16 points, plenty of white space, and good color contrast. Avoid clutter.

**Organize content and simplify navigation.** Make navigation buttons and clickable links easy to see and act upon. Generic labels for buttons like 'Next' or 'Back' are not helpful. The button should help them understand where a click will take them: 'Track meals' or 'Overview,' for example.

**Make your content printer-friendly.** You may have ditched your own printer long ago, but many patients like to print out what they learn so that they can show family members or hang it on the refrigerator to jog their memories, Robison and Hilfiker recommend.