

## Pain Management Coding Alert

### Reader Question: Weigh the Good, and the Bad, of Patient Engagement Technology

**Question:** We're starting to use more technology and online tools to engage our patients, but we're worried that we're not connecting with patients who aren't used to those tools. Should we worry? And how can we use our technology to engage them better?

Idaho Subscriber

**Answer:** Some of the myths we believe about patient engagement technology can actually stall our patient engagement efforts.

That's according to 2017 Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society conference speaker **Dr. Adrienne Boissy**, Chief Experience Officer at Cleveland Clinic. In a pilot study, researchers there connected a group of surgery patients to HealthLoop, a digital engagement tool. Boissy's team debunked two pervasive myths:

**1) Most patients are too old to want or use patient engagement technology.** "Let's challenge our assumptions," Boissy says. 90 percent of patients in her study reported that they owned a smartphone or tablet.

In the HealthLoop study, 80 percent of patients aged 18-30 used the tool, but all age groups had about 70 percent of patients using the technology. In fact, the percentage of patients using the tool in the 61-80 age groups was slightly higher than patients in the 31-60 age groups! Only in the 81+ age group did the percentage of patients using the tool fall, and even then, it was about 55 percent.

**2) It's nearly impossible to get patients to actually use patient engagement technology.** How the technology is designed is crucial, and alerts must "speak" to patients as if they are humans, Boissy says. She contrasted a typical message one might see in a patient engagement tool such as "Please go to the doctor's office" with a customized, human message such as "I'd like to connect you with Joanne, who can talk with you about what's going on. Would you prefer a call or an office visit?"

How the patient gets introduced to the technology is also crucial. In the study, human schedulers signed up patients during scheduling sessions.

Technology will never replace empathy and human relationships in clinical care settings, Boissy concludes. But at its very best, it has the power to enhance the human elements of medical care.