

Educating, empowering patients improves health

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More than 133 million Americans are affected by chronic disease, a number that is expected to reach close to 160 million by 2020, according to the National Health Council.

While technology, software and applications exist to help individuals monitor their health, the challenge lies in motivating people to use the tools consistently and in a way that makes a long-term difference.

A recent study by Xiaodong Deng, Ph.D., professor of management information systems at Oakland University's School of Business Administration, examined how empowering chronic disease sufferers to use [information technology](#) could help them better manage their illnesses.

"The key concept is psychological empowerment," Dr. Deng explains. The study found [patients](#) take a more active role in their recovery when there is a greater flow of information from physician to patient.

By examining archival data from a survey of patients involved in a diabetes management education program, Dr. Deng and his team found that media reinforcements such as emails and text messages helped patients educate themselves and adhere to their self-monitoring responsibilities with greater success.

Dr. Deng's research also found that email proved to be miles ahead of traditional forms of medical contact such as phone calls, letters or

postcards, allowing for a two-way mode of information sharing between physician and patient.

Emails also allowed for effective positive reinforcement, Dr. Deng explains. "For example, if the physician sends an [email](#) to the patient telling them to do this, don't forget that; or 'Hey, you did great,' they are providing them with [information](#) that keeps the patient alert and helps them continue their efforts," he says.

Furthermore, emails removed a patient's personal inhibitions about sensitive issues such as diet or weight and allowed clinicians to quickly respond to patient concerns. There was no need to schedule appointments around work schedules or a busy week at the doctor's office.

Education empowers patients to understand why their involvement is so critical to their own health. "From the patient's side, they may know their own symptoms, but not what led to them," says Dr. Deng. "Once patients understand what led to their issues, the doctor can suggest next steps. Then, they will know why what they're doing is important. And if they see results that reinforces those original efforts."

Ultimately, the more a patient knows and feels empowered, the healthier the outcome.

More information: Media Reinforcement for Psychological Empowerment in Chronic Disease Management, *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*: Vol. 34 , Article 22.
aisel.aisnet.org/cais/vol34/iss1/22

Provided by Oakland University

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