Risk Management
SNAPSHOT
Current issues and trends for
practice managers

Do ransomware attacks cause patient harm?

It seems reasonable to make the assumption that cyberattacks on health systems can lead to patient harm. Yet despite many attacks, there is little data to directly link the attacks to patient harm. A recent cyberattack at the University of Vermont Medical Center provided an opportunity for researchers to demonstrate how an attack leads to patient harm.

The pandemic has strained most healthcare systems, so when the University of Vermont Medical Center experienced a cyberattack in October of 2020, it gave researchers at the United States' Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) the opportunity to study the effects of the attack. The Verge article The Pandemic Revealed the Health Risks of Hospital Ransomware Attacks looks at what the CISA found in their review of the data.

Advisories against the use of ivermectin to treat COVID-19.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a health advisory detailing a surge in prescriptions for ivermectin and a veterinary formulation of the drug used to treat parasites in livestock. There has been a corresponding increase in severe illness associated with the misuse and overdose of this drug.

According to the Mississippi Department of Health, the Mississippi Poison Control Center has received an influx of calls from individuals who have ingested the medicine to prevent or treat COVID-19. These individuals have reported symptoms including rash, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, neurologic disorders, and potentially severe hepatitis requiring hospitalization. For more information, read the full article Health Dept: Stop Taking Livestock Medicine to Treat COVID, available through Medscape News.

Several organizations, including the American Medical Association (AMA), American Pharmacists Association (APhA), and American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP), have issued a statement strongly opposing the ordering, prescribing, or dispensing of ivermectin to prevent or treat COVID-19 outside of a clinical trial.

The CDC health advisory can be accessed here.

Our practice tip Medication Safety in the Office Practice offers valuable information on setting up safe medication processes in your office practice.

Is OpenNotes Harmful to Patients?

When Dr. Justin Maykel called his patient to deliver some bad news about the results of his colonoscopy, he was shocked to learn that the patient had already read the finding through the electronic medical record. Maykel took to Twitter to express his misgivings about the CURES Act, which gives patients access to their test results sometimes even before the provider has seen them.

Dr. Maykel's tweet generated many responses, and he was surprised to see that while some physicians agreed with him that the CURES Act was not good for patients, many others disagreed with his take on OpenNotes. Reading those responses gave him pause and changed the way he thought about patient access to health information. This story is available through Medscape Medical News.

Review What is Open Notes on our website for more information and resources on the CURES Act.

Taking to TikTok to fight misinformation.

Some scientists and physicians are taking to TikTok to spread health information to a broader audience and combat misinformation, especially around COVID-19 and vaccines. TikTok offers a different way to share public health information.

The article Docs on TikTok Fight Misinformation and Harassment describes how TikTok, a short-form video app, appeals to younger users because of its short, 15-60 second videos. These short messages often reach several hundred thousand users. As with any social media presence, providers should ensure that their content is evidence-based and presented respectfully.

Medical Mutual's practice tip Social Media Risks in Healthcare gives valuable guidance on avoiding risks while engaging in social media.

Toolkit to partner with patients for diagnostic safety.

Diagnostic errors can happen in any healthcare setting, and one in three patients will experience an error. Research has shown that breakdowns in patient-provider communication are a leading contributor to these errors. Can improved communication reduce this risk?

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) has developed a toolkit to help providers and practices engage patients and families to improve communications and reduce the risk of diagnostic error. The Toolkit for Engaging Patients to Improve Diagnostic Safety provides a roadmap to help practices implement these strategies.

Failure to diagnose is one of the most frequent allegations in malpractice claims. A direct relationship exists between this allegation and the lack of a comprehensive, reliable test/consult tracking system. Medical Mutual's practice tip Results Management: Tracking Diagnostic Tests and Referrals can help your practice develop a comprehensive program.

Call 800.942.2791 to speak with a Medical Mutual Risk Manager today.