

## EHR patient portals:

### Understanding patient participation and preferences

#### Key findings:

- 1. Two-thirds of respondents have signed up for one or more patient portals; patients are more engaged with PCP portals vs. specialist portals**
- 2. Patients are typically using portals to learn more about their health and communicate with prescribers**
- 3. To receive alerts from the patient portal, patients prefer email over text**

For many healthcare providers (HCPs), the EHR has become an indispensable practice management tool. But what about EHR portal use among patients? What percentage of patients currently uses their provider's EHR patient portal? Perhaps more importantly, what are patients wanting to accomplish as they use portals, and how do they want to receive alerts from portals?

In an effort to quantify the degree to which patients are currently engaged with patient portals and to understand their desire for access to information that helps them understand and manage their health, ConnectiveRx recently conducted survey research among a sample of 1,002 consumers, patients and caregivers (collectively referred to in this report as "patients") aged 19 to 80 years. The survey excluded patients with Alzheimer's disease, dementia or indefinable health insurance status, as well as those who had not had an HCP visit in the last 12 months.

In this survey, a patient portal was defined as a secure online website or app provided by a patient's healthcare provider that enables a patient to interact and communicate with their provider. Portal capabilities vary, though typically, at a minimum, they allow patients to view some parts of their medical record (chosen by the provider), such as vaccination records or some standard lab results, and communicate with the provider through secure messaging. In this survey,

reference to patient portals does not include insurance websites or apps, apps for wearable technology- or online health-related support communities or social media forums. The results include three key findings.

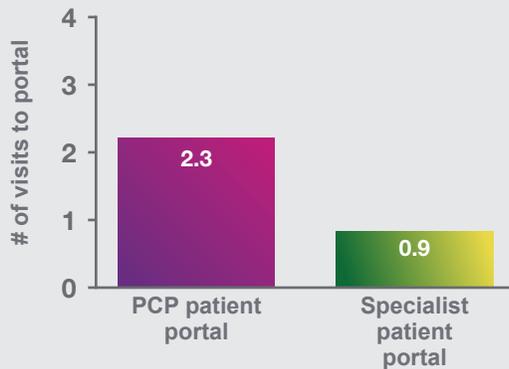
#### **Key Survey Finding #1: Two-thirds of respondents have signed up for one or more patient portals; patients are more engaged with primary care (PCP) portals vs. specialist portals**

Survey responses indicate that two-thirds of patients have registered to use a patient portal supported by a primary care provider (43%), a specialist (8%) or both (17%), a substantial increase compared with prior years. Leading reasons for not registering to use a portal include lack of knowledge (37%) and apathy (27%).

Interestingly, portal users were more engaged with PCP patient portals vs. specialty portals. As shown in Figure 1, when asked how often they had used a portal in the previous 12 months, patients reported accessing their PCP portals an average of 2.3 times and specialist portals 0.9 times.

**Figure 1: Patients are more engaged with PCP portals than with those of specialists**

Average portal use today (previous 12 months)



Source: ConnectiveRx patient portal survey, June 2017. n = 1,002  
Q: In the last 12 months, how often have you used the patient portal(s)?

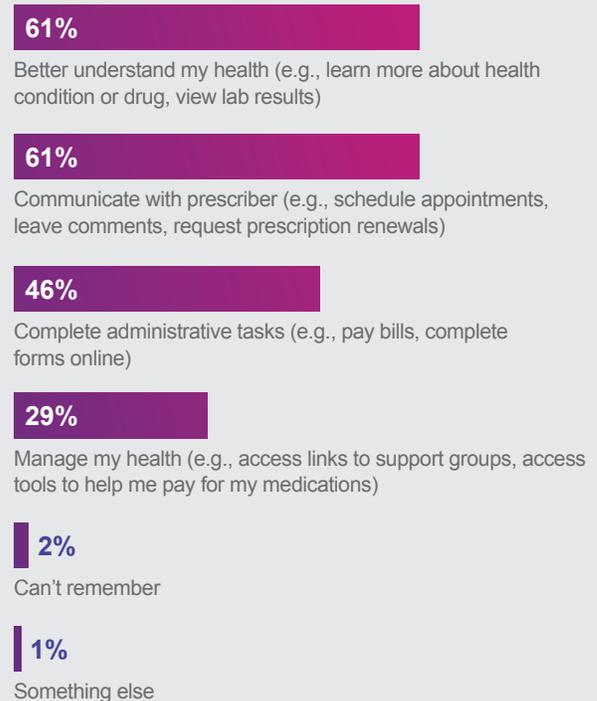
**Key Survey Finding #2: Patients are typically using portals to learn more about their health and communicate with prescribers**

When asked to characterize their use of patient portals during the last 12 months (see Figure 2), patients identified their two most common objectives as “better understand my health (e.g., learn more about health condition or drug, view lab results)” (61%) and “communicate with prescriber (e.g., schedule appointments, leave comments, request prescription renewals)” (61%).

Fortunately, patients report that their current portals do indeed provide certain content that helps them achieve the goal of understanding their health, including access to “lab or radiology results” (78%) and “vaccination records” (44%).

But portals can do more to help patients better understand their health. For example, less than a third of respondents report that they have portal access to “educational information on prescribed medications” (31%), “links to relevant patient resources” (29%), or “educational information on disease” (25%).

**Figure 2: Patients are typically using portals to learn more about their health and communicate with prescribers**



Source: ConnectiveRx patient portal survey, July 2017. n (those who have signed up for a patient portal and used it in the last 12 months) = 621  
Q: Please characterize your use of the patient portal(s) during the last 12 months. Multi-select.

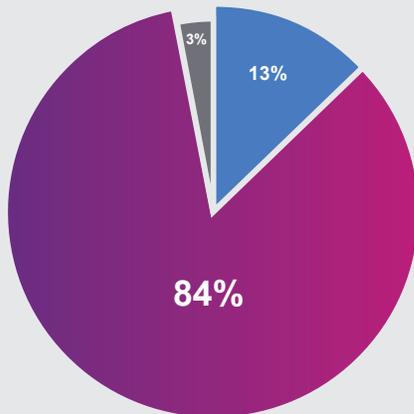
**Key Survey Finding #3: To receive alerts from the patient portal, patients prefer email over text**

Despite the continuing shift to mobile technology, including SMS and MMS messaging, survey responses suggest that email is still widely used. As shown in Figure 3, when receiving alerts from a portal, patients prefer email over text. In fact, 84% of respondents have already consented to receive email alerts from their portal, compared with 36% who have consented to receive text alerts. Furthermore, just 3% of respondents say they would not like to receive email alerts, compared with more than a third (34%) who say they would not like to receive text alerts.

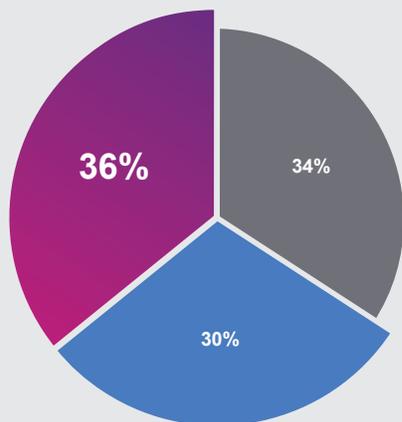
Based on these findings, several recommendations emerge.

**Figure 3: To receive alerts from patient portal, patients prefer email over text**

**Consent to receive email alerts**



**Consent to receive text alerts**



- Yes, I have consented to this
- I would consent to this
- No, I would not like to receive updates in this manner

Source: ConnectiveRx patient portal survey, July 2017. n = 683 patients who have signed up for a patient portal  
Q: Have you consented (or would you consent) to receive notifications when new relevant content is available to you on the patient portal (e.g., your lab result is now available?).

**THREE CORE RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 1. Focus on both the *number* of patient portal registrants and the *frequency* of their portal use.** Work to get a higher percentage of patients registered, then work even harder to encourage them to use the portal on a more consistent and ongoing basis. For ideas on boosting patient portal engagement, see “How Providers and Vendors Can Stop Patient Portals from Collecting Dust” by Mike Miliard.<sup>1</sup>
- 2. Offer more of the content patients want.** Populating patient portals with lab results and vaccination records is a good start, but consider expanding access to educational information on disease and medications as well as links to relevant patient resources.
- 3. Recognize patients’ preference to receive portal alerts via email vs. text.** Prioritize email as the primary portal alert channel. Better yet, give patients multiple options to receive portal alerts: email, text, phone call, mail...

To see additional findings from this research, including data regarding the potential benefit of shifting portal content to include more educational information as well as links to current savings offers and relevant patient resources, visit the Resources section on ConnectiveRx.com and download the companion white paper, “Boosting engagement through patient portals: Delivering the content patients want.”

For more information, please visit [ConnectiveRx.com](http://ConnectiveRx.com)

**References:**

1. Miliard M. How Providers and Vendors Can Stop Patient Portals from Collecting Dust. *Healthcare IT News*. July 31, 2017. <http://www.healthcareitnews.com/news/how-providers-and-vendors-can-stop-patient-portals-collecting-dust>. Accessed Dec 7, 2017.