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a patient might need, especially as healthcare continues to focus more on productivity and throughput. For example, a diabetic patient/member needs information about how and what to eat, exercise options, the importance of yearly foot and eye exams, how to monitor their blood sugar, how often to get an HbA1c test in a laboratory, and so forth.

Even if there is time to go through all of that information it can be overwhelming – which means a lot of it may not get through.

By sending regular, short alerts to that patient's or member's mobile device through text, SMS, an app, etc. the information can be broken up into smaller bites that are easier to understand, remember, and act on.

Getting personal

Of course, many current wellness programs send out helpful tips to mobile devices, but they are usually generic. Personalizing the alerts to coincide with the patient's/member's needs or interests is what will make them far more effective.

Take an overweight patient who has been identified as a dog lover, either through a conversation, an online survey or as a result of dog-related purchase patterns. Rather than sending a generic reminder to get more exercise in the spring, the alert could point out dog-friendly parks or other areas where both master and pet can get a good workout.

Of course, to get to this level of personalization you will need a broad swath of data. Health insurers, government agencies, and employers can start with claims and/or survey data, then supplement it with outside data such as demographic, socioeconomic, and psychographic data. Physicians can use clinical data from their electronic health record (EHR) systems and claims data, again supplemented by outside data.

When the data has been gathered, sophisticated, next-generation analytics will enable you to stratify patients/members by risk level so you understand which ones need the most immediate attention, and how much of it. Patients/members in the highest risk categories for hospital admissions, emergency department (ED) visits, complex procedures, etc. will typically be the highest priority, because changing their outcomes will have the greatest impact under value-based care/risk sharing arrangements. Once they are identified, you can begin delivering the appropriate alerts.

Getting ahead of trends

The value of mobile alerts isn't limited to patients who already have serious issues. The analytics can also be used to identify patients who are trending toward a particular problem or condition, such as

pre-diabetics, so steps can be taken to prevent or at least forestall it from developing. After the initial conversation with the physician, the alerts can remind the patient/member of what to do to avoid the issue as well as the consequences of not taking positive steps now.

In some cases, the alerts can be used simply for education, such as in the case of patients/members with lower back pain. Reminders to exercise and stretch, with specific, personalized choices for those activities, can help them relieve the immediate pain and avoid a costly procedure in the future.

Adding demographic data can help governments manage populations more effectively as well. Take a poverty-stricken area where anemia is a problem due to a high density of fast food and low availability of healthier food choices. To address it, the government can work with schools to help educate students on what they should be eating through mobile alerts, and even develop food programs to deliver better choices in the school. The possibilities are endless.

Simple to execute

Healthcare organizations and employers already have most of the data that's required. All they need then to take advantage of the power of mobile alerts is the analytics capabilities to identify patterns and stratify patients, a team to create the alerts, a delivery network to send them, and the desire to affect real change.

The transition to value-based care and shared risk has created an urgency to not just deliver better care but to change patient/member behaviors so less care is required. Mobile alerts offer them a bold new way to make it happen. 