CareQuest
Institute for Oral Health ®

Patient Portals

Patient Perspectives and Opportunities for Practices

What is a patient portal?

A patient portal is a secure online website or application that gives patients access to their health information.[1] Federal regulations have placed an emphasis on providing patients with access to their health information through electronic means, as well as limiting the ability of providers and systems to block information sharing desired by patients.[2] Patient portals often have a variety of features, such as appointment scheduling, educational resources, and provider messaging; access to health history, lab tests, and imaging results; and costs, billing, claims, and payment information.[3,4] These features are designed to help patients stay informed and better engage with their personal health.

Introduction and Methods

CareQuest Institute for Oral Health engaged Qualtrics to conduct a nationally representative survey to understand patients' attitudes, experiences, and behaviors related to provider-supplied patient portals and access to electronic health information: the Patient Perspectives on Patient Portals survey. The panel provided sample coverage of the adult population (18+) in the United States. A total of 1,022 individuals responded to the survey.

How patients want to engage with their electronic dental health information

2 out of 3
adults reported **interest in receiving their dental records through a portal.**

More than
4 out of 5
adults stated that they wanted **their dental records shared with medical providers electronically.**

7 out of 10
adults wanted **their patient portal to contain both medical and dental records.**

Patient experience and perspectives

Only

1 in 5 adults

had accessed a dental portal before, and of those who had accessed a dental portal, **over 90% reported being satisfied with the experience.**

These findings corroborate the results of a nationally representative survey that found **16%** of adults had used a patient portal to access dental health information.

2 in 3 adults reported

experience using a medical portal, and of those who had accessed a medical portal, about **90% reported being satisfied with the experience.**

Adults with insurance were more likely to report being **very satisfied (63%) with their medical portal experience** compared to those without insurance **(45%)**.

4 out of 5 adults

indicated that they felt **patient portals were somewhat or very secure.**

Satisfaction with medical portal experience did not change across residence location, with approximately **6 in 10 adults in suburban, urban, and rural locations saying they were very satisfied.**
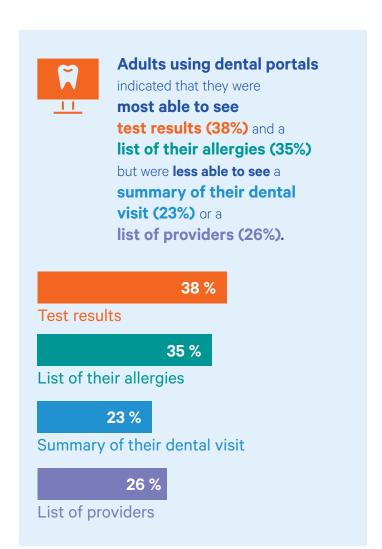
Similarly, satisfaction with medical portals was consistent across all education levels, with approximately **6 in 10 adults in each education group** (less than high school through postgraduate) **reporting being very satisfied.**
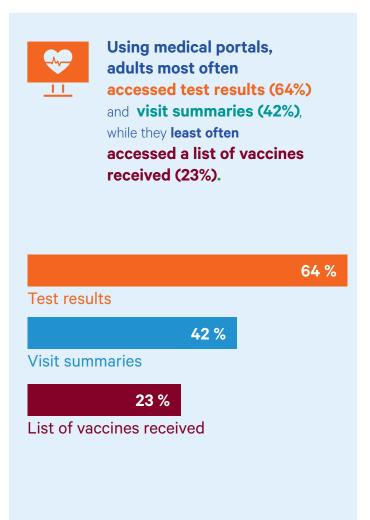
When using dental portals, nearly half of adults indicated that they were able **to request appointments, referrals, and prescriptions (45%)** and **communicate with their oral health care providers (39%).**
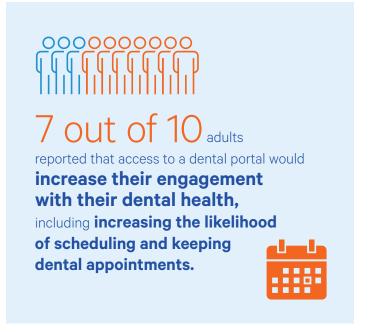
Meanwhile, approximately **1 in 5 (17%)** adults said they were able to use the dental portal **to learn more about dental problems or concerns,** or **to access their child's or parent's oral health care record (21%).**

Adults using dental portals indicated that they were **most able to see test results (38%)** and a **list of their allergies (35%)** but were **less able to see** a **summary of their dental visit (23%)** or a **list of providers (26%)**.

38 %	
Test results	
35 %	
List of their allergies	
23 %	
Summary of their dental visit	
26 %	
List of providers	

Using medical portals, adults most often accessed test results (64%) and **visit summaries (42%)**, while they **least often accessed a list of vaccines received (23%)**.

64 %	
Test results	
42 %	
Visit summaries	
23 %	
List of vaccines received	

What benefits are perceived by patients from increased access to electronic dental health information?

3 out of 4 adults said having access to a dental portal would **improve their ability to track and understand their oral health** as well as **increase their trust in their dental provider.**

7 out of 10 adults reported that access to a dental portal would **increase their engagement with their dental health,** including **increasing the likelihood of scheduling and keeping dental appointments.**

Implications and Recommendations

All participants in the current oral health care reform debate seem to agree on the need for more progress and collaboration with health information technology (HIT) and data architecture to improve quality and control costs. Despite the tremendous potential of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and Meaningful Use Rule for electronic health records (EHRs) to achieve these goals, there are still significant barriers to collaborative enactment.

Successful implementation demands a balance of organizational culture and administrative hierarchies with technical requirements and workflow integration. Many people must be engaged in this process, including technical staff, clinicians, and hospital administrators. Even so, if the technology does not readily improve efficiency, reduce costs, integrate with workflow, or support the potential for quality improvement, providers may refuse to use it. Research indicates that ease of use of an EHR system directly affects the coordination of oral health care, and that both medical and dental care teams are 2.4 times more likely to integrate oral health care when they report ease of use of their HIT.[5,6]
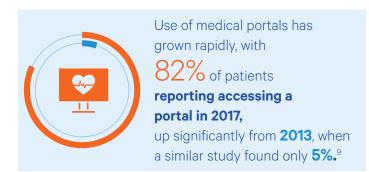
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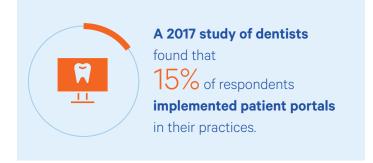
Because of these complexities, many projects aimed at integrating and implementing HIT have been unsuccessful.[7,8] Most attribute the lack of success to too much disruption as technology imposes significant additional work instead of providing a streamlined, intuitive structure that assists the care team in their day-to-day functioning. Ultimately, care teams want to get information out of HIT that is useful to them and their patients, considering all the work they are doing to put data into the system.

As part of the 21st Century Cures Act and Office of the National Coordinator (ONC) Final Rule, there is a mandate that all health care providers offer patients access to their own clinical notes. This requirement is different from those called for in the HIPAA Privacy Rule because it requires patients to have immediate access to their digital data, such as via a patient portal. Providers must make the following eight data types available to patients free of charge:

- Consultation notes
- Discharge summary notes
- History and physical
- Imaging narratives
- Laboratory report narratives
- Pathology report narratives
- Procedure notes
- Progress notes

Use of medical portals has grown rapidly, with 82% of patients reporting accessing a portal in 2017, up significantly from 2013, when a similar study found only 5%.[9] Although several dental EHR vendors have begun offering patient portals in their suite of products, adoption by oral health care providers is still relatively low. A 2017 study of dentists found that 15% (70/476) of respondents had implemented patient portals in their practices. The same study found that most respondents were unfamiliar with the Meaningful Use/American Reinvestment and Recovery Act incentives available for EHR implementation.[10]

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The results of this patient survey suggest that individuals desire access to their personal dental health information, feel that patient portals are secure, think the experience of using portals (both medical and dental) is satisfactory, and want the ability to share dental information with their medical providers. These trends were consistent across racial groups, age groups, genders, and education levels. Furthermore, an overwhelming majority of adults agreed that access to a dental patient portal would increase their general understanding of dental health and level of trust in their dental providers and would help them manage their overall health goals. From these responses, we can confidently say that patients see value in this type of electronic health engagement and that dental providers have opportunities to engage with their patients through electronic communication and information sharing. While implementation of new technology can be burdensome and costly, the activation of a patient through engagement with portals may provide a significant return on investment.

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