



Care Through ePortal: Best Practice from Ireland



Electronic patient portals (ePortal) enable patients and care-partners (eg, family members) to securely access their health records and communicate (eg, instant messaging or chat) with healthcare providers. In general, ePortals promote transparency and help patients become more involved in care and decision-making, thus enhancing patient-clinician collaboration.

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Amidst the current pandemic, use of ePortals takes on more significance given the need to abide by travel restrictions and social distancing measures. In Ireland, for example, the care of patients with epilepsy is now mostly done through telephone and video consultation, except in emergency situations that require face-to-face interaction, according to Irish researchers who are behind the 'PiSCES' portal project (Power et al. 2020).

PiSCES is the acronym for Providing Individualised Services and Care in Epilepsy, also referred to as the Irish Epilepsy ePortal. This technical innovation aims to promote patient- and family-centredness of epilepsy care. Thanks to the growth of its digital capacity over the years, the Irish epilepsy care ecosystem has been prepared to quickly switch to virtual/remote care – as needed – in the current COVID-19 environment, the researchers point out.

The ePortal is linked to the Irish National Epilepsy Electronic Record. The research team employed a combination of ethnographic research, document analysis and joint application design sessions to identify the key requirements to build the portal. The information gathered was useful in developing the appropriate modules, user interface and other technical specifications of the platform.

The PiSCES portal's main functional features (or modules) are:

- My Epilepsy Care Summary

- My Epilepsy Care Goals
- My Epilepsy Clinic Letters
- Help Us Measure Your Progress
- Prepare For Your Clinic Visit
- Information for Your Healthcare Provider

The ePortal can be accessed only by authorised users, who are given different types of access control depending on individual roles – ie, a patient, a carer or healthcare professional (epilepsy doctor or nurse). This means a patient can only access their own record while an authorised clinician can access records for patients to whose circle of care they belong.

Essentially, the system engages people with epilepsy as ‘co-authors’ of their own medical record. For example, under the ‘My Epilepsy Care Goals’ module, patients or their carers can document their plans regarding both their psychosocial and biomedical epilepsy care needs. The module contains a list of prompts that a user can choose from, including: ‘Stop My Seizures,’ ‘Resume or Start Driving,’ and ‘Reduce Sleep Deprivation.’ Or patients can write down their own objective(s) for their epilepsy care through a ‘Custom Goals’ gateway.

"Post COVID-19, it is highly unlikely that the healthcare sector will return to a 'business as usual' way of delivering services," wrote the researchers, noting that electronic patient portals such as PiSCES can facilitate radical reform of out-patient care, cost containment and environmental sustainability.

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