Improving communication in pediatric atopic dermatitis by implementation of a written action plan

Rabina Walsh MD, Bree Zimmerman MD and Erin Mathes MD
Department of Dermatology

The Problem
Poor adherence to topical treatment regimens for childhood atopic dermatitis is common and complicated by fluctuations in disease activity and the need for multiple medications. Written action plans have potential for improving outcomes in pediatric atopic dermatitis, similar to their use in asthma. Further, written action plans have been shown to improve patient/parent understanding of treatment in atopic dermatitis. Despite this, these plans have not been universally implemented or integrated into electronic medical records.

Project Goal
We planned to provide a written eczema action plan (EAP) in at least 75% of new patients with a primary diagnosis of atopic dermatitis seen by dermatology residents, pediatric dermatology fellows and pediatric dermatology faculty in the pediatric dermatology clinic from July 2014 through April 2015. If the EAP was not appropriate, a non-use phrase was used to give simple but specific and structured patient instructions and also counted toward the goal.

Project Plan
- An EAP and a non-use phrase were created electronically as Apex SmartText templates with the input of the pediatric dermatology fellows and faculty.
- Monthly emails were sent to dermatology residents assigned to pediatric dermatology to educate them on the EAP and logistics of use.
- Applicable encounters were manually audited on a quarterly basis.
- A short survey was distributed to residents, fellows and faculty who used the EAP.

Results

Figure 1: Example EAP

Figure 2: EAP or Non-Use Phrase Use by Month

Figure 3: Survey Results

Lessons Learned
Our results demonstrate that an electronic EAP is feasible, gained acceptance over time and was felt by providers to increase patient understanding and to improve outcomes. The plateau at a high rate of use suggests providers feel the tool is not appropriate for all patients. Incentives and ease of use are important factors in successful implementation.

Moving Forward
Further work is needed to assess patient and parent perception and impact on objective disease outcomes. We can work with our rotators to increase the use of the EAP and structured instructions when appropriate. We plan to educate all providers in the department of dermatology about the EAP for use in adult clinics when appropriate.