Skin Biopsy Result Tracking and Follow-up in Dermatology Resident Clinics

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The Problem
Tracking skin biopsy results and communicating them to patients in dermatology resident clinics can be challenging as residents rotate through several clinics. Failure to report biopsy results to patients, or a delay in this process, can lead to unnecessary worry and frustration. Furthermore, an uncommunicated or delayed result could lead to adverse outcomes, and could even be life-threatening.

Project Goal
We have established an incentive goal of 95% report rate of biopsy results to our patients within 14 days. We sought to achieve this rate within the first quarter of the academic year.

Results / Progress to Date
- We achieved our goal of at least 95% of patients called with biopsy results within 14 days for the first three quarters
  - 1st quarter: 97.5%
  - 2nd quarter: 96.6%
  - 3rd quarter: 98.2%
- Reminder emails were sent on a monthly basis to encourage residents to document their patient calls in the biopsy book
- Decrease in compliance in 2nd quarter possibly due to Apex implementation with need for documentation in two different locations

Lessons Learned
We found that patients were very pleased with receiving biopsy results in a timely manner, which several patients expressed in their follow up visits. We also found that we received fewer calls from patients who had not received biopsy results in a timely fashion. Prior to the implementation of this incentive program, calls to our answering service seeking results was relatively commonplace. The residents in charge of the PLN auditing noticed that after the first few months the need to remind residents to call with results diminished, demonstrating that residents are increasingly incorporating this responsibility in their daily practice.

Moving Forward
Our biggest challenge is to ensure that patients continue to receive biopsy results in a timely fashion. Our experience has indicated that residents have incorporated this responsibility in their practice. With the implementation of Apex, results can be accessed remotely, and results are directly sent to resident inboxes, which ensures residents see the result and can therefore call patients in a timely fashion. In the next quarter, we will audit a representative sample of patient charts in Apex to determine whether communication rates remain high without monthly reminders.

Project Plan
A pilot study was performed for 25 patients who had biopsies in January 2011. Patient charts and the path log notebook (PLN) were examined for documentation that the patient was called. 15/25 (60%) patients were notified within 14 days with a documented date of call. In an additional 3 cases (12%) a call was documented but not the date. Based on this, we had a 72% rate of reported biopsy results. Our plan was to apply stringent criteria to ensure our goal of 95% reported results within 14 days. Residents would contact patients and record the date of their communication in a newly created column of the PLN, which would be internally audited by residents on a bimonthly basis.

Communication of Skin Biopsy Results

- Actual
- Goal

% Called and Documented

Pre-Incentive 1st Quarter 2nd Quarter 3rd Quarter