OpenNotes: Giving Patients Access to Medical Notes

What is it?

OpenNotes is a tool that gives patients access to their medical records so they can read encounter notes.

Patients can access their notes online through the patient portal or in hard copy from a printout.

Why is it important?

OpenNotes has been associated with improved medication adherence, improved communication, increased understanding of care plans, greater patient and family engagement, and greater patient and provider satisfaction.

It's the right thing to do—it's the patient's record. It helps patients better understand their diagnosis and plan of care. It better engages patients in their care.

How can I get started?

OpenNotes has a toolkit available to help you get started. Go to http://www.opennotes.org/toolkit/.

The toolkit contains guidance and tools such as frequently asked questions (FAQs), advice for providers on writing fully transparent notes, and tips for institutions for successful program launch.

Common questions

Will this be more work for me?

- No, you enter the notes as you always have, and patients get access through the patient portal.
- Do I have to change the way I write my notes?
- No, although some providers report that they use more lay language and avoid judgmental language.

Will patients ask me more questions?

- The OpenNotes demonstration project found no net increase in email messaging between patients and providers. Also, for every call or email made, there may well be one that is *not* made because patients find their answers in the notes.

What providers are saying

"It changes how the patient and I relate. It is an equalizing force that brings the patient in as a partner."

"Once patients have access to their notes, they are not likely to be willing to give it up."

What patients are saying

"I am more a part of the team than outside of the care itself."

For a full case study on OpenNotes, see the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, http://www.ahrq.gov/professionals/quality-patient-safety/patient-family-engagement/pfeprimarycare/index.html.