Study 19-0023: Exploring patient's perspectives regarding privacy when using e-communications to deliver research surveys after emergency department visits.

Introduction

Many patients use e-communication tools, such as email or short message service (SMS or text messages), in their daily lives. However, it is well known that e-communications are less secure, with higher risks for privacy breaches in terms of personal health information. In the context of research surveys, a unique solution to this issue is to contact patients electronically with only basic information related to their hospital visit and hyperlinks to secure online surveys, which minimizes the risk for exposure. To do this however, some basic health care information may be shared via email or SMS. We wish to explore whether this privacy exposure is acceptable to patients.

Study Purpose and Objective

What is the patient perspective on receiving e-communications regarding research surveys and the associated privacy considerations?

Methods

This will be a prospective survey study with the following inclusion and exclusion criteria:

Inclusion criteria:

1. Age ≥ 18 years old
2. Patients assigned a Canadian Triage and Acuity Scale (CTAS) score of 2-5
3. Expected discharge home.

Exclusion criteria:

1. Patient unable to provide informed consent.
2. Insurmountable language barrier
3. Acute medical issue, such as severe pain, for which study participation may interfere with the provision of care.
4. At the request of the treating physician

Recruitment and survey administration

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, research assistants are not able to approach patients directly while in the Emergency Department. Additionally, RA's must be invited by someone in the circle of patient care to speak to a patient about participating in the study. Therefore, we are asking MD's, RN's and learners to briefly inquire if the patient assents to being contacted by the RAs by telephone. If the patient agrees, the RA will phone them after discharge and discuss the study, obtain consent, and administer the survey.

Outcomes

The main outcome will be to explore how comfortable patients are receiving e-communications regarding research survey. This will be based on the proportion of responses to Likert scale questions as well as thematic analysis of the free text responses. The excepted final product will a collection of key concepts that reflect patient's perspectives and experiences with privacy and e-communications for research surveys.