

HINTS 2017: Online Medical Records Are a Critical Tool for Women

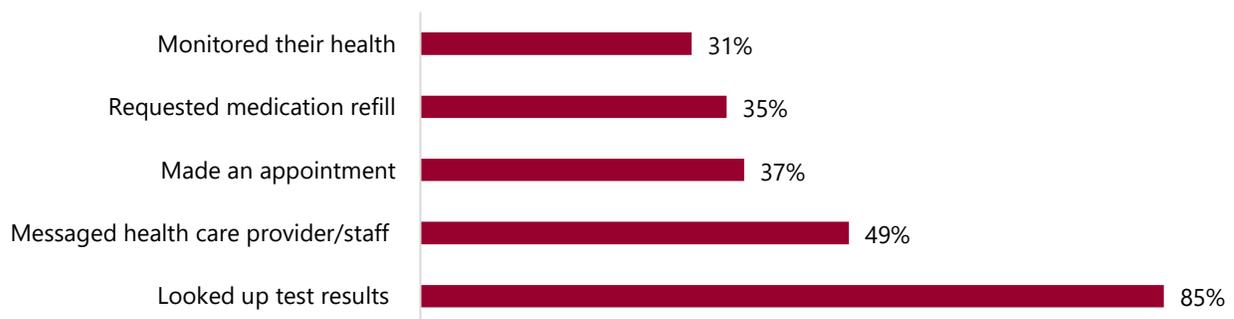
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We're missing opportunities to engage women in the use of online medical records. That is a key takeaway from the 2017 Health Information National Trends Survey (HINTS). Since 2003, the National Cancer Institute's (NCI) HINTS has collected nationally representative data about people's use of health information. For the most recent survey, NCI included questions about online access and consumer use of health information technology (IT). The National Partnership for Women & Families worked with the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) to develop digital health questions, analyze responses and interpret findings. In this fact sheet we highlight a few findings related to how women use online health records (such as patient portals). HINTS 2017 survey questions and data are available online [here](#).

Key Findings

In 2017, half of Americans were offered access to an online medical record by a provider or insurer. Among those offered access to an online medical record, more than half accessed their record at least once. Click [here](#) for additional findings.

- ▶ Women are significantly more likely than men to be offered access to online medical records by health care providers or health insurers (59 percent of women compared to 44 percent of men).
- ▶ However, women are not significantly more likely to *use* online medical records. Only 54 percent of women accessed their records online when offered access by their health care provider or insurer.
- ▶ If women were offered and encouraged by their health care provider to use their online medical record, they were nearly twice as likely to access it as those who were offered but not encouraged.¹ When women were offered access to their online health record, here's how they used it:



Recommendations

Women make almost 80 percent of health care decisions for their families,² nearly two-thirds of caregivers are women,³ and women have more health needs than men,⁴ so it is critical that women be able to take full advantage of the ways digital health records can save them time, energy and money. The following recommendations would support progress toward a patient-centered health system in which people have easy electronic access to their health information.

- ▶ Advocates and decision-makers should increase patient and provider awareness of online medical records and make clear the value of these tools to support patients' health and health care. Resources like ONC's [Patient Engagement Playbook and Consumer Guide](#) can help health care providers and patients get the most out of patient portals and other health IT tools.
- ▶ In payment reform models (e.g., the Merit-Based Incentive Payment System), policymakers should continue to promote meaningful patient engagement by requiring providers to share information and communicate electronically with their patients.
- ▶ Companies that develop electronic medical records and patient portals should continue improving user interfaces to help more people get the most out of these tools.
- ▶ Health care providers and health systems should maximize the functions available in their patient portals, including enabling secure messaging, making clinical notes available and offering better care planning and shared decision-making tools. They should also invest in tools and resources that help providers communicate the value of patient portals to their patients.
- ▶ Health care providers and health systems should explore ways to collect and integrate into their medical records the kind of robust health information that women are generating and storing on their mobile devices. This could open the door to additional treatment and wellness strategies that leverage patients' existing mobile behaviors.
- ▶ If we are to maximize digital health tools to achieve a more patient-centered health care system, health care payers, policymakers, federal agencies, providers and advocates must do a better job informing people about their [rights](#) to their health information, including information that is not made available through patient portals.

¹ These rates of use are among women who were offered access to their online medical records and viewed their data at least once within the last year.

² U.S. Department of Labor. (2013, December). *General Facts on Women and Job Based Health*. Retrieved 24 January 2018, from <https://www.dol.gov/sites/default/files/ebsa/about-ebsa/our-activities/resource-center/fact-sheets/women-and-job-based-health.pdf>

³ National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP. (2009, November). *Caregiving in the U.S. 2009*. Retrieved 3 April 2018, from http://www.caregiving.org/data/Caregiving_in_the_US_2009_full_report.pdf

⁴ See note 2.