

Letters

Communication is key to 'medical home'

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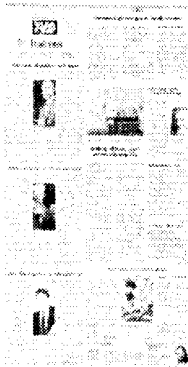
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A USA TODAY article accurately described the attributes of a "medical home." A medical home assists patients with hospitalizations and coordinates specialty care and other tasks ("Old-fashioned physicians inspire new concept of 'medical homes'" News, Monday).

In the article, Dr. Joseph Mambu is quoted as wanting to re-create "the old-fashioned doctor who has the time to get to know you."

That kind of help is especially necessary for children with special needs who often need teams of professionals providing care.

It would also be valuable for adults with chronic diseases. They require the care of multiple specialists who order myriad tests and often prescribe multiple drugs.

This concept of medical homes is laudable, but the most important in-

gredient is communication.

The medical home requires a sophisticated, integrated electronic medical record system that allows the primary care physician access to hospitalization summaries, laboratory tests, specialists' referral notes, all prescribed medications and documentation of primary care and preventive care.

Do sophisticated programs that can work across multiple software platforms exist?

Even if they exist, who can afford to pay for them?

Until the problem of comprehensive communication across all nodes of care has been solved, the medical home is just a nice phrase that will not accomplish the goal of completely caring for the patient.

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Take time with patients

Coordination of care is certainly important, but it does not necessarily lead to better care and less cost.

The real challenge for primary care physicians is to find enough time to discern, in partnership with the patient, which care is most appropriate.

Today, given the time constraints placed on physicians, it frequently is most expedient to order an expensive test. Nonetheless, doctors need to take the time to explain which diagnostic and therapeutic approach might, or might not, be indicated.

If patients fail to improve, they often will opt for the less aggressive/less expensive approach, provided consistent follow-up and access can be assured.

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