

Leveraging Practice Fusion's Free Web-Based EHR to Transform Nursing Education

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Introduction

The adoption of electronic health records (EHRs) is a key driver to achieving major health transformation needed in the U.S. healthcare system. This represents a critical juncture for nursing education, as nurses comprise 55% of the healthcare workforce. One of the recognized barriers to improving informatics education for all nurses remains the limited access to EHR information systems and technology. Nursing schools often rely on clinical practicum sites that are frequently limited in scope and provide limited access and education on EHRs for students. This pilot project uses an innovative educational strategy to leverage Practice Fusion®, a free, web based EHR, for family nurse practitioner (FNP) students at Simmons College. Practice Fusion is the fastest growing EHR community in the country with more than 130,000 users serving 28 million patients (www.practicefusion.com).

Methods

Because of budgetary constraints, in January 2012, Practice Fusion® (PF) was selected as a pilot project in an Advanced Health Assessment class of 60 FNP students. This ten-week hands on experience involves a “work-up” of a new “volunteer” paid patient from the Boston community. During the four-hour class, one hour is allotted for the history and one hour for a complete physical exam. Students record pertinent health data in real time using PF on laptops or iPads. After the visit, an extensive, tailored, patient write-up including evidence based differential diagnoses, review of systems, problem list and pharmacologic inventory are uploaded by the student on PF for faculty feedback and grading with a 1:3 faculty student ratio. To date, there are approximately 400 student encounters in our academic EHR.

Results

Preliminary survey results reveals that FNP students perceive a significant educational benefit from using PF in real time. Specifically, they value becoming familiar with, and learning how to use, an EHR as well as learning to incorporate an EHR into workflow while also learning advanced health assessment skills. They also believe that PF makes the volunteer patient experience more realistic, resembles real life practice, and is good practice for the future. One student stated, “EHRs are the wave of the future which we need to learn in school – it is good practice typing and talking to a patient at the same time.”

Challenges include addressing the computer as a potential barrier to facilitating a therapeutic relationship and documentation during the physical exam. Problems with the technology include pop up ads, computers freezing and time outs logging them out of the system. However, the majority would recommend using PF in the future with students at all levels.

Discussion

Practice Fusion's EHR addresses the complex needs of today's nursing students and disrupts the health information technology status quo. This project is ongoing and authentic, situated in practice, teaches skills needed to practice and addresses critical skills which can be translated to future employment regardless of location, demographics or specialty. It also addresses the gap between the information technologies adopted for educational purposes and those actually used in practice. At the conclusion of this pilot project, data mining will include ICD 9 codes, ethnicity, demographic data, and BMIs for 800 encounters.