

The Novel Use of an Online Signature Platform to Remind Patients to Complete Genetic Testing

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Introduction: A cancer genetics clinic used a telephone genetic counseling and mail-in saliva genetic testing kit model to improve access to genetics services. A systematic process using telephone reminders (TRs) and electronic reminders (ERs) via an online signature platform was piloted in an attempt to increase saliva sample return rate (SSRR) to the laboratory for test completion. Here, we describe the reminder process, response rates, and SSRR for this pilot project.

Methods: Patients electing to undergo testing were sent a saliva collection kit from the testing laboratory. Patients whose sample had not been received for testing by the laboratory were sent first and second reminders at 2 and 4 weeks from date of service, respectively. First reminders were sent electronically to patients with email addresses. Those without email addresses received telephone reminders. All second reminders were via telephone. The reminder process was re-started for patients with failed samples who elected to proceed with testing using another sample.

Results: During the 6-month study period, 225 patients elected to proceed with testing. Of these, 45% (102/225) required a reminder with 9.8% (10/102) getting TRs only, 40.2% (41/102) getting ERs only, and 50% (51/102) getting ER + TR. Of patients who got TRs only and ERs only, 50% (5/10) and 78% (32/41) responded, respectively. Of patients who got ER + TR, 43% (22/51) only responded to TRs, 16% (8/51) only responded to ERs, and 10% (5/51) responded to both.

Overall, 72/102 (71%) patients responded to ≥ 1 reminder, for whom the SSRR was 82% (59/72), compared to 30/102 patients who did not respond to TRs or ERs, for whom the SSRR was 50% (15/30). Of the 61 patients who got TRs only or ER + TR, 27 (44%) only responded to TR and SSRR was 22% (6/27). In comparison, of 92 patients who got ERs only or ER + TR, 40 (43%) responded only to ER, and SSRR was 93% (37/40). For the 5 of 51 patients who responded to both ER and TR, SSRR was 100%.

Discussion: This study demonstrates that reminders increase SSRR. While response rates were similar for patients receiving ERs and TRs, sample return rates were higher for patients who received ERs. In an era with increasing telehealth visits, use of an online electronic platform is an easy and time-efficient method for reminding patients to return samples for test completion. Future directions of study include comparative analyses between reminder methods in privately insured patients versus uninsured patients, and English versus Spanish speaking patients.