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Insurance Continuity Improves Preventive Care for Diabetic Patients
Study Shows that Diabetic Patients Treated in Community Clinics Fare Better with Continuous Insurance Coverage and a Medical Home

Portland, Oregon – The first published study to use data collected through OCHIN’s unique practice management database that links safety net clinics in Oregon might help to inform future policies and treatment for low-income patients.

The study found that diabetic patients who receive care at Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) and have *continuous* health insurance coverage are more likely than those with *interrupted* coverage or *no coverage* to receive preventive tests and vaccines that can improve wellness. Examples of these services include cholesterol screenings and flu vaccinations, recommended at least annually for diabetic patients.

Although the paper did not examine the reasons for these differences in care, providers report that patients who don’t have continuous coverage often decline diagnostic tests due to fears about costs. Even though most services at FQHCs are provided at no cost, some preventive tests require a small co-payment.

The study included administrative and insurance data from over 100 safety net clinics in Oregon and nearby states, serving more than 300,000 patients. Patients were considered to have continuous coverage if they had insurance on January 1, April 1, July 1 and October 1, 2005. They were considered to have interrupted or discontinuous coverage if they had coverage on at least one of those dates, but not all of them. Coverage could come from Medicaid, Medicare or private insurance.

According to the study authors, “Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) are doing a good job of providing healthcare to the underserved, but they cannot completely close the gap between patients who have continuous health coverage and those who don’t”.

The study was conducted by research partners at OCHIN (previously, Oregon Community Health Information Network), the Kaiser Permanente Center for Health Research, the OHSU Department of Family Medicine, and the Multnomah County Health Department.

The article will appear in *Medical Care*, a peer-reviewed national publication, in April 2009.

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