



Inviting patients to read their doctors' visit notes

What is OpenNotes?

Patients have the right to review their medical records, including their doctor's visit notes, but that rarely occurs. Generally, patients don't ask, and doctors don't offer. In OpenNotes, doctors use a secure Internet portal to invite patients to review notes following an office visit.

This innovative approach toward increased transparency makes sharing and viewing doctors' notes easy and a matter of course.

The heart of OpenNotes is to *involve patients* far more actively in all aspects of care and to *improve communication* between the doctor and patient. Open notes also encourages patients to *share information* with others, including those who care for them, and it may help *prevent mistakes*.

Since 2010, primary care doctors in three diverse, major health centers around the country have invited their patients to read their visit notes online. The three sites in the OpenNotes pilot are:



Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center,
a Harvard teaching hospital

GEISINGER

Geisinger Health System,
Pennsylvania's rural health network



Harborview Medical Center,
a UW Medicine academic medical
center serving vulnerable populations
in Seattle and King County



What Do Patients and Doctors Think?

A large team of researchers is evaluating how this innovation affects practice. Before the project began, they asked 170 doctors and 38,000 patients about what they anticipated from sharing and viewing doctors' visit notes. The survey findings showed:

- Patients were enormously interested and optimistic, regardless of age, education level, or health status.
- Patients anticipated learning more about their conditions, feeling in greater control, and taking medications more effectively.
- Few patients were worried or anxious about what they would read in their notes.
- Doctors were cautious and held widely varying views, but a majority felt open notes were a "good idea."
- Doctors were concerned about greater demands on their work lives, frightening their patients, and compromising quality if they changed the way they wrote notes.

To learn more about OpenNotes visit our website at www.myopennotes.org or follow us on **Twitter: @myopennotes**

The project is being led by:

Tom Delbanco, MD • tdelbanc@bidmc.harvard.edu
Jan Walker, RN, MBA • jwalker1@bidmc.harvard.edu

The project leaders are on the faculty at Harvard Medical School and Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center.

What Will the OpenNotes Project Tell Us?

Findings documenting the impact of open medical notes on both patients and doctors will be published in 2012. The results will answer some highly important questions:

How did it affect patients?

- Did patients choose to read their notes?
- Did they report:
 - Having better recall after visits?*
 - Feeling more in control of their care?*
 - Feeling better educated?*
 - Taking medications more effectively?*
 - Being frightened, confused, or worried by the notes?*
 - Preventing important mistakes?*
 - Sharing their notes with family, friends, and health professionals?*

How did it affect doctors?

- Did sharing notes cause a major change in the work life of the primary care doctor?
- Did they report:
 - Feeling disrupted by an avalanche of patient questions?*
 - Changing the length or focus of visits?*
 - Changing the way they write their notes?*
 - Hearing that they confused or frightened their patients?*
 - Seeing changes in the way patients managed their conditions?*

After a year, did patients *and* doctors want OpenNotes to continue?

Why Is OpenNotes Important?

Offering patients ready access to their doctors' notes is a simple intervention that promotes transparency and could profoundly change the way people engage with their health and health care. Designed to help both patients and clinicians, shared notes can be seen as a new "medicine," one whose potential adverse "side effects" for some may be minimized by careful attention, and outweighed by the overall benefits.

Might this practice spread to involve all clinicians, including medical specialists, nurses, physician assistants, mental health professionals, occupational and physical therapists? Can it help both inform and prevent stress among caregivers vital to patients with chronic illness? Might it lead to a shared medical record generated jointly by patients and clinicians, as both contribute actively to high quality care?

As adoption of electronic health records and the use of patient portals spread, transparent visit notes could become a new standard of care that fosters improved quality and patient safety. But both doctors and patients need to be introduced to the concept and to learn how to use it to maximal advantage. We expect the results of this large study will answer important questions and provide evidence that may make this simple but important intervention a routine part of care.

The initial OpenNotes survey found that:

Up to
97%
of **patients** thought open visit notes were a good idea.

Up to
92%
of **doctors** participating in OpenNotes anticipated improved communication and patient education.

Up to
77%
of **doctors** participating in OpenNotes thought that patient satisfaction would improve.

Up to
58%
of participating **doctors** believed that open visit notes would result in greater worry among patients.