Proactive Text Messaging for Public Health Surveillance During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Place: Remote

Abstract

Problem
The Department of Public Health (DPH) of a suburban Midwestern county considers surveillance and control of COVID-19 to be sub-optimal, resulting in part from difficulties with completing case and contact interviews.

Methods
To increase the success rate of case investigation, proactive messaging using short message media (SMS) alerts is used in a quality improvement initiative based on the PDSA framework. Participants are sent text message alerts prior to receiving a call from a DPH case investigator. Results are recorded in a statewide database.

Results
Individuals who received text messages prior to receiving a case investigation interview phone call were more likely to complete the interview. In a sample of adults aged 18-50 years, participant age did not have an effect on the likelihood of SMS response. These findings suggest that SMS alerts are effective in improving the case investigation process.

Implications for Practice
Contacting members of the public via SMS alert prior to initiating COVID-19 case investigation phone calls was an effective strategy for increasing case investigation completion rates in both younger and older adult age groups without significantly adding to operating costs. More broadly, these results herald the increased integration of technology into health care communications, and health care providers should become accustomed to the idea of increased electronic, out-of-office interactions.

Defense of Dissertation Committee
Laura Kuensting, DNP, APRN, PCNS-BC, CPNP-PC, CPEN, Co-Chair  
Louise Miller, PhD, Co-chair  
Cathy Koetting, DNP, APRN, CPNP, NP, Committee Member