Implementing an Ambulatory Safety Net (ASN) for high-risk patients overdue for colorectal cancer screenings

Background
- Colorectal cancer: Third-leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the U.S. for men, fourth-leading cause of cancer death for women.
- The COVID-19 pandemic halted most elective procedures resulting in many patients becoming overdue for surveillance colonoscopies.
- MIT Health needed a streamlined way to track colonoscopies. We wanted to follow patients from scheduling to report follow-up and needed to set up a field for “colonoscopy recall date” in our EMR.

Our Goal
Identify high-risk individuals and ensure 80% of eligible patients complete (or schedule) colonoscopy.

Ambulatory Safety Net Intervention
In October 2022, we implemented our Ambulatory Safety Net (ASN) program to close the loop on overdue surveillance colonoscopies for at-risk patients.
- Extensive chart reviews identified overdue patients and set recall recommendations in our EMR.
- Registry of eligible patients created using Smartsheet software.
- Two dedicated patient navigators assigned to perform patient outreach to each patient in the registry.
- Designed and implemented an in-house process used to identify, reduce, and eliminate barriers to colonoscopy follow-up.

Our Results:
- Scheduled or completed colonoscopies increased from 29% to 97%
- Successfully contacted 91% of high-risk patients

Lessons Learned
- Create a patient registry that allows easy tracking and generates report metrics.
- Automate whenever possible.
- Include an EMR field for colonoscopy recall date — allows for quick identification of eligible patients.
- Have a dedicated patient outreach team to track colonoscopy reports and set recall dates — allows your primary care team to focus on other healthcare concerns.

Creating an Ambulatory Safety Net can help close the loop for high-risk patients overdue for surveillance colonoscopy.

Fast Facts
- The top three barriers identified:
  - Scheduling limitations
  - Fear
  - Transportation

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