



The next frontier for AI: Prescription refills

By Rod Moore | April 17, 2018

Artificial intelligence has been earmarked for curing cancer and delivering personalized medicine in the future, but the technology is already at work today automating a task that takes time away from providers and staff: prescription refills.

Refill management may be one of the most promising applications of machine learning, as Valley Medical Group in Western Massachusetts has discovered over the past 18 months. The independent, multispecialty group, with about 115 total providers serving patients across four health centers, has turned to Charlie, a cloud-based tool from Healthfinch that integrates with EHRs to automate the process of prescription refills.

Charlie pulls in refill requests, compiles requests with relevant patient data, and processes requests through an evidence-based rules engine to determine whether the request is in protocol, out of protocol, a duplicate,

erroneous or other status. Specific protocols can be applied so that the tool knows what to look for with each refill request.

Now, of the 10,000 refill requests that come in monthly to Valley Medical, 60 percent are managed by a clerical person only, without requiring provider review, and the workload of clerical staff has been cut in half, says Martha Mastroberti, manager of healthcare informatics.

An early revelation from Healthfinch's data service: Many of the refill requests Valley Medical received were duplicates. "Twenty percent of our monthly requests were duplicate requests," Mastroberti says. "I had no idea how much time we spent either investigating those requests or actually filling them by accident."

"Healthfinch provides a ton of data and insight into our practice that we never knew and things that we couldn't

have known because we were so busy getting the work done," Mastroberti continues.

Although productivity can be hard to measure, she adds, the fact that Healthfinch has built a refill management system that meets clear, consistent protocols is giving back more time to clinical providers.

"For us it just makes so much intuitive sense and it brings so much staff satisfaction. It gives them back time to do more valuable work."

Rod Moore is a writer based in Nashville, Tennessee.

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