10 Ways to Convince Patients to Use the Patient Portal
Staff can explain how to review labs, e-mail non-urgent messages, schedule appointments, and print lab reports for specialists through the patient portal.

Use handheld technology such as Phreesia's point-of-service platform when patients check in for appointments and to set up a username and password for the portal before leaving the office.

Michele C. Reed, family physician, owner and medical director of New York-based MS Family Medicine Health Care
Find a patient portal that works for your practice and is easy to use. Streamline the registration process, make sure all functions are turned on so it can be used to its fullest potential, and ensure physicians and other staff are prompt in responding to patient needs within the portal.

Patient portals that are difficult to use won't be utilized regardless of the tactics employed to get patients on board.

Daniel Sands, primary-care physician, Healthcare Associates at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston; chief medical officer, Conversa Health
Physicians aren't used to sharing their records, lab results, and other patient information, especially at the speed required by modern portal technology. As such, there has been a lack of commitment on behalf of physicians.

However, a portal that is seamlessly integrated with a practice's billing system and EHR helps streamline work flow within the office and offers a simplified way for physicians to communicate with patients. Doctors need to make a commitment to using the technology despite their own fears and continue to communicate that commitment with their clients.

*Seth Flam, California-based family physician, chief executive officer and director, HealthFusion, Inc.*
Patients can't be expected to use something they don't know exists. Publicize the portal and its benefits to patients through signage in the office, a message on voicemail menus, on check-out material, and when interacting with patients on the phone.

This requires office staff to understand what the portal is and what it can do for patients. When staff members speak to patients on the phone to help refill a prescription, set up an appointment, or collect test results, they should remind patients about the portal and how to register for it (or, even better, register the patient right then on the phone).

*Sands*
5. Sell the benefits to the patient.

Though a medical practice benefits greatly when patients commit to using a portal, frame the benefits from the angle of the patient.

Explain that actively using the patient portal allows them to manage appointments online, download immunization records, share medical history with other healthcare providers, pay bills, and request refills all from the comfort of their home at their convenience without having to visit or call the physician's office.

*Flam*
Sometimes it takes a forceful nudge to get patients to sign up for a service. Push patients to use the portal by sending appointment confirmation e-mails with a link to the portal.

This serves as an invitation to engage patients in the portal and initiate digital interactions within the space.

**Gregg DeNicola, California-based family physician, founder, Caduceus Medical Group**
Many patients wish to use e-mail for communication, submitting their questions and concerns on their own time.

Though there may be a front office e-mail address to submit general questions, strictly restrict physician-patient communication to the portal.

Allen Kamrava, attending staff at Cedars Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, Department of Surgery, Division of Colorectal Surgery
Use the portal as a place where patients can educate and empower themselves to understand and act on their healthcare history.

Though office staff can call with lab results and other information, storing this information in a portal lets a patient consult it on an as-needed basis without having to find a place to store it in the meantime.

Additionally, more detail — such as a comparison of historical medical data, monitoring tools, and general healthcare tips — can be made available in the patient portal.

*Drew Stevens, president and chief strategy officer, Stevens Consulting Group*
It's not enough just to offer a patient portal that can be accessed via the Web. As more people reach for their digital devices, it is imperative that a practice's patient portal remains available to them in multiple formats.

Your practice website should provide a link to the portal, and both the website and portal should be mobile friendly. Additionally, make sure the portal has an app component so patient information can be retrieved on the go.

*DeNicola*
Encouraging patients to use the portal should be an effort across the practice that is long lasting. Patients should get a little push at every interaction from the time they make the appointment to when they get their statement. Physicians should consider “prescribing” the portal to patients who might need it most or who need an extra push. Have a staff person who helps patients learn how to access and use the portal to help overcome obstacles.

Reinforcement is the key: Don't give up if it doesn't take off right away. Stay the course and build awareness over time.

*Tom Giannulli, internal medicine physician, chief medical information officer, Kareo*