



The Colorado Health Foundation™

**Title:** Case Study on Patient Portal Deployment in Behavioral Health Clinics (Mental Health Center of Denver)

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**Context for Use:** This article is a case study of the deployment of a patient portal in a behavioral health clinic.

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**Patient Portal Deployment in Behavioral Health Clinics.** Patient Portal implementation at the Mental Health Center of Denver (MHCD), a grantee of the Colorado Health Foundation's Enhance Health Engagement through Patient Portal Use funding opportunity, highlighted several differences from organizations with a primary care focus. Full Circle Projects consultants Tom Dawson and James Meyers acted as coaches to MHCD, who contributed to the development of this case study.

The patient portal deployment at MHCD began shortly after their recently completed project to migrate to a new electronic health record (EHR), causing concern that the staff would suffer from implementation fatigue. To mitigate this risk, the MHCD project plan was designed to roll out the portal in phases, spreading the impact out over the duration of one year. The project plan was developed with extensive input from the MHCD leadership team, guiding the configuration of the portal and informing development of new workflows.

**Behavioral health providers may benefit from MHCD's patient portal implementation experience. Key lessons include:**

1. **The behavioral health information technology vendor landscape can be challenging to navigate.** Compared to the primary care health IT market, the behavioral health market is smaller and less standardized. Mainstream EHR vendors offer modules for behavioral health, but practitioners can also choose EHR systems designed specifically for behavioral health providers. Selecting a path is not a straightforward decision. Behavioral health EHRs are designed specifically for this environment, offering more features and configurability. The mainstream EHR market is much larger, which can allow these vendors the resources to build strong support structures. MHCD chose a behavioral health-specific EHR.
2. **Enrollment and use rise when patients have meaningful support.** To address patient-level barriers to using the patient portal, MHCD used grant funds to create a peer mentor team that hired clinic customers and trained them to enroll other customers into the portal and support them in portal use. The peer mentor team was an extremely effective strategy for reaching out to MHCD customers. The program had the additional mission-based benefit of offering supportive employment opportunities to customers.
3. **Seeking quick wins is an effective deployment strategy.** To combat implementation fatigue and achieve staff and provider buy-in, MHCD selected features for deployment in the early stages of the project that would quickly show results. For example, appointment reminders were an early hit with customers.
4. **Secure electronic messaging must be approached with careful planning.** Secure electronic messaging is a commonly deployed feature, given that it is a Meaningful Use Core Measure, but it is useful to wait for a base of customers to be enrolled before doing so. For example, MHCD waited until the second phase of deployment, and then rolled out messaging to therapists and case managers serving adult populations first, as they see the majority of the organization's patients. The clinic also addressed provider concerns by adding warning language to the portal to communicate to patients that messaging is not a venue for therapeutic conversations. Patients in crisis are instructed not to use the portal.
5. **The portal can support tracking outcomes measures.** MHCD uses an assessment called the Customer Recovery Measure (CRM) to measure customers' perception of their recovery. MHCD worked with their vendor to build CRM functionality into their portal. This allows customers to complete the CRM on the

portal, where they can also see a graph of their progress. The MHCD EHR vendor saw the value in this innovative functionality and has since built it into their core product.