

Health Risk Assessments (HRA) have existed for years, but are quickly becoming an integral part of population health management (PHM) strategies. A Healthcare Intelligence Network survey showed that 70 percent of healthcare organizations use HRAs to measure health risk factors, and 52 percent plan to launch an HRA in the coming year.

At the most foundational level, aggregate HRA data can be used to develop health improvement and prevention programs. There are benefits to the practice and to the patients. When used well, they can effectively lower health care costs, improve utilization, increase wellness program enrollment as well as improve health outcomes and return on investments. By providing summaries of patients' health risks and behaviors, it is easier for you to recommend ways they can reduce risks and possibly improve their health.

HRAs can include a multitude of information: from medical conditions to lifestyle risk factors, medical risk factors, readiness to change, health perceptions and medications. They can be administered through print forms, face-to-face sessions with a health care professional, over the phone or through web-based applications. In addition to self-reported data, biometric screenings, readiness to change, lab data, medical claims and pharmacy claims can all be included. Ultimately they can create member profiles, self-care suggestions, health coaching opportunities and identification opportunities for care coordination as well as of care gaps.

According to Mercer, the best HRAs are not only scientifically sound, but visually appealing as well. In addition to assessing standard measures such as blood pressure, cholesterol, height and weight, they include questions regarding job satisfaction, self-esteem and stress levels.

HRAs will continue to take on new forms and new roles into the future. For example, Audax Health, a health technology company, has merged assessments with social networking, mobile technology, games and behavioral psychology to build interactive experiences to increase participation, continual engagement and compliance. For example, someone who identifies themselves as diabetic could connect with others with the same chronic disease.

While incentives can be important, less is more. The cognitive evaluation theory suggests that larger rewards can be perceived as controlling or coercive. It is more important to patients' increase intrinsic motivation and self-determination to change behaviors. Small trinkets, t-shirts or small monetary rewards work better because they are seen as bonuses to their own efforts.

These new technologies combined with employee wellness incentives, especially those which are personalized can build on the HRA foundation to increase success.