

# Exploring Patient Interest in Portal Use and Barriers to Access in Behavioral Health

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## Background

- There is little knowledge about the uptake of patient portals in the behavioral health population.
- Generally, portal uptake is 50%, highest among young women, high-income, and college-educated individuals. (1)
- The Health and Recovery Practice (HARP) at the University of Maryland Addiction Treatment Center integrates primary and behavioral health care, allowing unique opportunities to explore patient populations often overlooked in health portal uptake.

## Objectives

- To explore interest in accessing patient portals at HARP
- To identify barriers to accessing patient portals among the behavioral health patient population
- To facilitate sign-up for patient portals at HARP by direct assistance and demonstration activities

## Methods

- A convenience sample of patients at the clinic was surveyed one day per week for two weeks in March 2023, and a four-question survey assessed patient access and interest (Figure 1)
- Following the convenience sample, a patient portal sign-up workshop was organized in the clinic's drop-in center
  - Flyers were created and posted throughout the clinic (Figure 2) and snacks were offered
  - A similar convenience sample, this time with two questions, was taken during the workshop (Figure 3)

## Figures

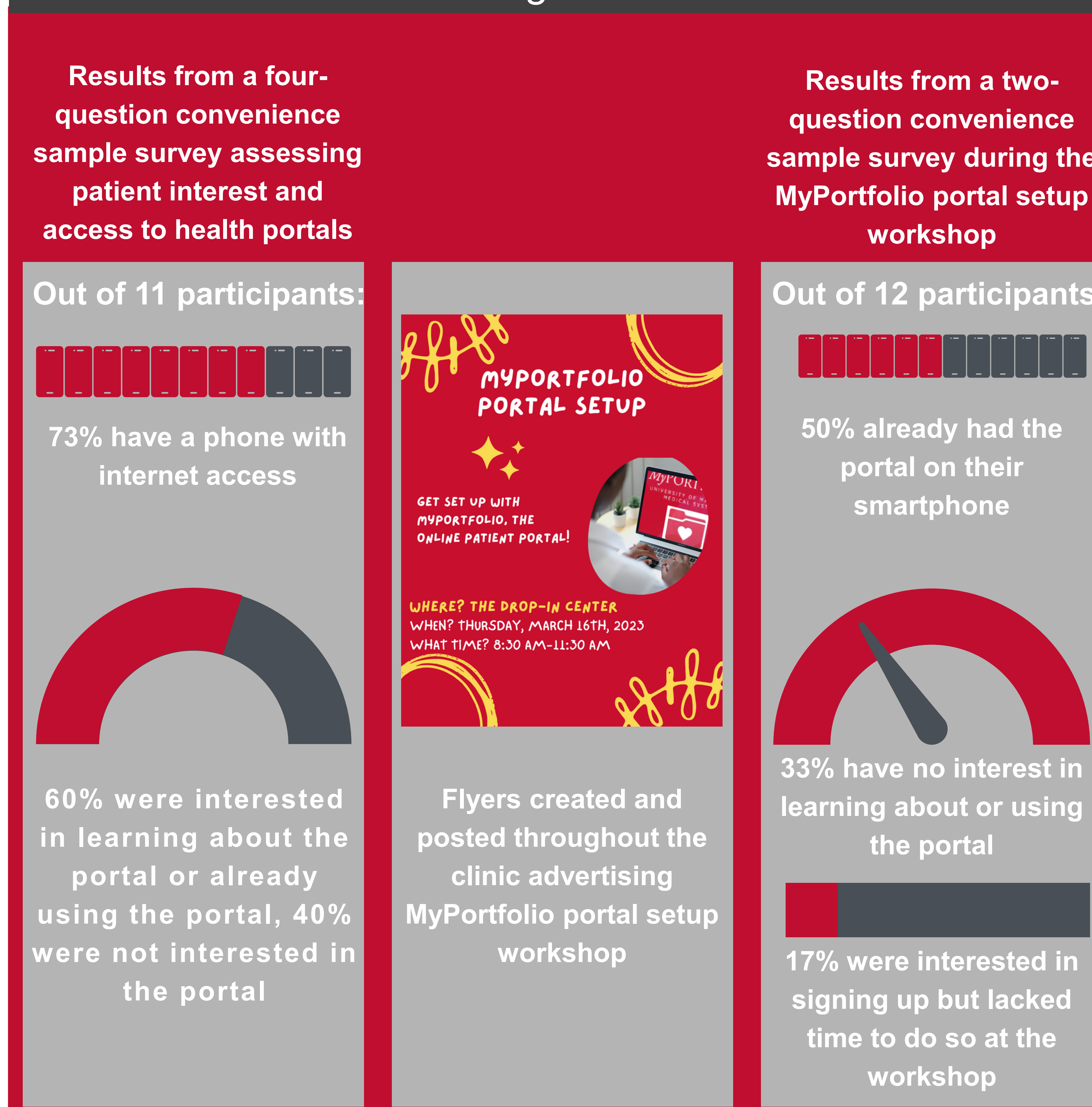


Figure 1. Four-question survey results    Figure 2. Flyers for portal workshop    Figure 3. Two-question survey results

## Results

### Four-question convenience sample survey results:

**11 total participants were surveyed, of whom**

- Most were male between ages 30 and 50 years old or older, and estimated to be of low or middle-income and Medicaid eligible
- Race data not collected but participants were Black, White, and other
- 73% have a phone with internet access
- 60% were interested in learning about the portal or already using the portal, and 40% were not interested in the portal
- Patients reported viewing lab results, appointments, and messaging doctors as the most appealing features

### Patient portal workshop held in the clinic drop-in center:

**12 total participants were surveyed, of whom**

- 50% already had the portal on their smartphone
- 33% have no interest in learning about or using the portal
- 17% were interested in signing up but had insufficient time to do

## Conclusions

This small pilot project with a convenience sample yielded results consistent with prior research on patient portal use and interest in a behavioral health setting.

- 60% of participants at HARP clinic have an interest in and ability to use a patient portal
- Many patients have phones with Internet access, and fewer have computers with Internet access

To address patient engagement concerns, we considered peer-to-peer assistance, connecting individuals who have and use the patient portal to assist those who do not. Additionally, a one-page infographic about the portal is available for distribution, including a QR code for easy setup.

Future research should continue to assess and promote patient portal use in this setting to increase patient engagement in their health and healthcare and to address digital health literacy.

## Bibliography

1. Heath, S. (2022, September 29). *Patient Portal Use in Mental Health Is Up, But Digital Literacy Key*. Patient Engagement HIT: <https://patientengagementhit.com/news/patient-portal-use-in-mental-health-is-up-but-digital-literacy-key>