

ACTION PLAN

Practice improvement strategies

Measure meaningful use

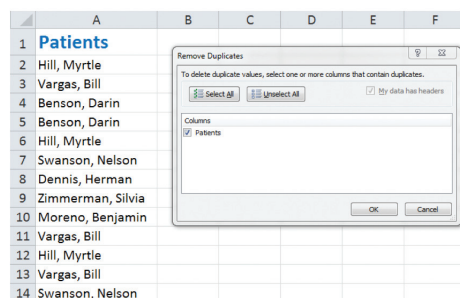
As practices strive to meet meaningful use requirements and get incentive payments from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), dashboards and charts can simplify the process. Using the unique patient denominator to maintain lists of active medications, allergies, current diagnoses, demographics, vital signs and smoking status can help. Here's how CMS defines the unique patient denominator: "If a patient is seen more than once during the EHR reporting period, then for purposes of measurement that patient is only counted once in the denominator for the measure."¹

Unique patients

If you export EHR data to Microsoft Excel®, use the built-in Remove Duplicates feature in Excel 2007 and 2010 to calculate unique patients:

1. Start with a list of patients seen during an EHR reporting period.
2. To remove duplicate patients, select the list of patients, click on the Data tab and choose the Remove Duplicates option. Your screen should look like Figure 1. Click OK.

Figure 1



Your screen should look like Figure 2. Notice that Excel shows the duplicate values found and how many unique values remain. You will permanently delete duplicate values so you may want to keep a copy of the original data.

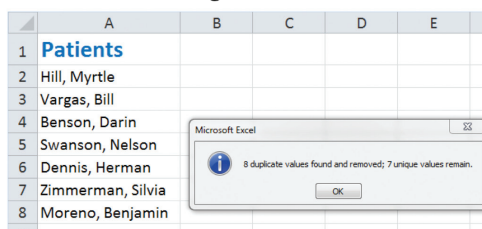
If your EHR lets you download a list of patients and a meaningful use measure, use the Remove Duplicates function with multiple data columns. For example, in Figure 3 there's a column for smoking status. If you highlight both columns (A2 to B16) and choose Remove Duplicates, you can choose columns to scan for duplicates. Excel will remove duplicates when data in the columns you select are the same.

Counting patients

Use Excel's COUNTA function to count cells that are not empty. The formula in B10 to count patients with smoking status recorded for the numerator in Figure 4 is =COUNTA (B2:B8). The formula in B11 to count unique patients for the denominator is =COUNTA (A2:A8).

see **Action Plan**, page 36

Figure 2



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ACTION PLAN


Warning

COUNTA counts cells that aren't empty. Some EHRs will put something such as a space in a cell with no data. While a cell might look empty, COUNTA will see a space as text and count it. To test for this problem, use the ISBLANK (cell reference) function, which produces a "True" if the cell is empty and a "False" if something is in it. If you have this issue, add another column to your EHR data spreadsheet.

Figure 5 shows an ISBLANK column that tests whether or not a related cell in column B is blank. Cell C10 uses a COUNTIF function, which counts "False" cells. The formula in C10 is =COUNTIF (C2:C8,"FALSE").

You can also prevent false reports of blank cells with Excel's Find & Replace function (on the Home tab, choose

Find & Select and then Replace) to find a space or whatever your EHR is putting in blank cells. Leave the Replace section blank to ensure proper counts.

Practices that use Excel features like Remove Duplicates, COUNTA, ISBLANK and COUNTIF can track their progress toward achieving meaningful use and adjust policies, procedures and protocols to correct shortcomings. 

join the discussion: What tools are you using to meet meaningful use criteria? Tell us at mgma.com/connexioncommunity or connexion@mgma.com.

Notes

1. Eligible professional meaningful use core and menu set measures. Washington, D.C.: Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, EHR Incentive Program; undated [cited 14 June 2011]. Available from: cms.gov/EHRIncentivePrograms/Downloads/EP-MU-TOC.pdf.

Figure 3

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Patients	Smoking Status				
2	Hill, Myrtle	Yes				
3	Vargas, Bill	No				
4	Benson, Darin					
5	Benson, Darin					
6	Hill, Myrtle	Yes				
7	Swanson, Nelson					
8	Dennis, Herman	No				
9	Zimmerman, Silvia	Yes				
10	Moreno, Benjamin	No				
11	Vargas, Bill	No				
12	Hill, Myrtle	Yes				
13	Vargas, Bill	No				
14	Swanson, Nelson					
15	Dennis, Herman	No				
16	Zimmerman, Silvia	Yes				

Figure 4

	A	B
1	Patients	Smoking Status
2	Hill, Myrtle	Yes
3	Vargas, Bill	No
4	Benson, Darin	
5	Swanson, Nelson	
6	Dennis, Herman	No
7	Zimmerman, Silvia	Yes
8	Moreno, Benjamin	No
9		
10	Numerator	5
11	Denominator	7
12	Percentage	71%
13	Threshold	50%
14		OK

Figure 5

	A	B	C
1	Patients	Smoking Status	ISBLANK
2	Hill, Myrtle	Yes	FALSE
3	Vargas, Bill	No	FALSE
4	Benson, Darin		TRUE
5	Swanson, Nelson		TRUE
6	Dennis, Herman	No	FALSE
7	Zimmerman, Silvia	Yes	FALSE
8	Moreno, Benjamin	No	FALSE
9			
10	Numerator	5	5
11	Denominator	7	7
12	Percentage	71%	71%
13	Threshold	50%	50%