5 Ways Mobile Tech Can Improve Your Health

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Just a decade ago, if someone had said that Steve Jobs would have a huge effect on how medical professionals administer care, that prediction would have been met with an eye roll. But the reality is people increasingly access healthcare services via mobile, or “mHealth.” The result: Mobile is having a transformative effect on the way physicians and nurses care for patients. It’s also impacting how consumers manage their own health and well-being. Unconvinced? The following statistics might change your mind.

By the end of 2012 mHealth apps will have been downloaded 44 million [1] times. By 2016, that number is expected to increase to 142 million downloads.

- By this summer, 13,000 consumer health apps [2] will be available for download on the iPhone. About half of those (6,000) are for medical professionals.

- More than 80% [3] of physicians own a mobile device, compared to 50% of the general U.S. population.

- About 30% [3] of physicians are using smartphones *and* tablets to treat patients.

So exactly how are these devices shaping healthcare? Here are five ways companies are adopting mobile technologies to improve healthcare delivery.

1. Tracking Physical Activity

We’ve all been told that losing weight involves taking that extra flight of stairs, walking instead of driving, and cutting back on calories. But who has the time to keep track of all that? Enter health monitoring devices that can be snapped to your belt loop. Mobile apps like FitBit [4] help log workouts, meals and weight. Naturally, weight loss is a key benefit of these apps, which is timely, given that obesity is a serious health epidemic facing the U.S. So much so, that First Lady Michelle Obama

has strongly pushed her Let's Move [5] campaign.

2. Medical Reference Technology

Imagine walking into your local hospital with symptoms of a near-fatal, but perfectly treatable, breathing disorder. However, not one of the attending physicians is able to properly diagnose it, not to mention figure out the exact dose of medicine with which to treat you. In many parts of the world, access to quality healthcare and skilled medical professionals is a hard-won luxury. That means the above scenario is a reality for many patients. Health eVillages [6] is working to fix this global health dilemma. The non-profit organization donates mobile phones and iPads pre-loaded with Skyscape [7] medical reference technology to clinics in at-risk and underserved regions. The organization is currently working to train clinicians on the mobile devices in places such as Kenya, Uganda, Haiti, and China. The goal is to improve patient care where the latest and best medical education is not readily available.

3. Getting to the Right Clinician

We've all been to the doctor's office on a tight schedule, and have waited through what feels like tedious but necessary check-ins, check-outs, and other administrative tasks. Oftentimes, we just want answers to our most common medical questions: "What might I have?" and "Where should I go for treatment?" ITriage [8] is a mobile health app designed to enhance the doctor-patient visit. Six million people have downloaded the app, which helps patients identify their symptoms and then directly connect to the most appropriate physician for their medical condition. Patients also have the ability to make medical appointments and check in to the emergency room via their mobile phones.

4. Connected Hospitals

More hospitals are adopting mobile as part of their care methods. Take Miami Children's Hospital [9], one of the country's top pediatric hospitals, with more than 650 physicians covering 40 pediatric specialties and sub-specialties. The hospital recently signed on PatientPoint [10]'s HealthSync platform, a mobile care coordination system for patients and staff. The patient engagement mobile tool includes registration functions (check-in and check-out), ways to increase medication compliance, and general health and wellness promotions. Miami Children's Hospital also plans to leverage iPads with HealthSync to address potential treatment gaps, and deliver clinical surveys and screenings to patients.

5. VA Telehealth Services

The U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs [11] has been at the forefront of providing mobile health services to make veterans' (and their families') lives easier. Just recently, the VA announced plans to give 1,000 family caregivers iPads [12] pre-loaded with health apps. That way, primary caregivers can take better care of their veterans without leaving home. The initiative is also part of a pilot program called Clinic-in-Hand, which is testing distribution through a VA app store set to launch next year. This includes health apps that allow for the exchange of personal data

between the VA, veterans, and caregivers, providing greater insight into what veterans need in terms of treatment and at-home care.

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