

a Perfect Combination

The Bluetooth SIG (Special Interest Group) recently announced the formation of a Medical Devices Working Group that will create a Bluetooth Medical Device Profile. The Medical Devices Working Group is made up of 19 industry-leading companies including IBM, Intel, Nonin Medical, Philips Electronics and Motorola, among others.

The purpose of the group is to develop a Bluetooth Medical Device Profile that will expand Bluetooth[®] technology applications into the medical and health industries. "Health-related devices in the home, such as weight scales, blood pressure monitors and exercise equipment, which implement the new standard will be able to send information wirelessly to Bluetooth-enabled PCs or cell phones so that users can monitor their health information or share this information with a doctor or fitness coach anywhere in the world," said Robert Hughes, chair of the new Bluetooth SIG Medical Devices Working Group and a senior wireless standards architect in Intel's Digital Health Group.

Although Bluetooth-enabled devices have been around for quite some time, because they are proprietary, interoperability problems exist between devices among the different manufacturers, which has limited this expansion. Once completed and ratified, this profile will ensure easy interoperability between medical devices and personal consumer electronic products such as computers, mobile phones, PDAs.

The creation of such a profile will have a positive impact on all of us. With the baby boomer generation approaching retirement and the spiraling cost of healthcare, consumers, particularly those with chronic conditions, will surely benefit from the ability to monitor their health and share information with their doctor or caretaker wirelessly through Bluetooth-enabled devices. The benefits are too numerous to mention in this column; however, one potential usage that I think deserves special merit is the ability to manage the administration of medication. Being fortunate enough to still have my parents with me who are in their mid-eighties, I have witnessed on many occasions the "lively" repartee between my parents while they debate the subject of who took their red, yellow, white, blue or pink pill today and who forgot or is saving it for later.

According to information released by the Bluetooth SIG, medication management

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will be possible now. A person will receive a reminder to take their medication using a Bluetooth medication dispenser. If the individual fails to take his/her medication after several reminders, an alert is sent to the doctor or medical caregiver. If the Medical Device Working Group is successful in creating such a standard, it will, in my opinion, be one of the most significant advancements in Bluetooth technology to date. Sure, having the convenience and access to more common Bluetooth applications, such as mobile phones and PDAs is convenient; this application clearly has the ability to save lives. Enabling health-related devices to communicate with doctors through consumer electronic products is a win/win situation. It is good for both patients and also is a potential area of growth for companies that manufacture such devices.

The Medical Device Profile will be compliant with HIPPA and other international data privacy requirements. The group expects to have the new profile available for use in products by mid 2007.

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