Mobile Apps for Doctors

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As the number of people accessing the internet with mobile devices increases, the number of businesses and industries using apps are also increasing to meet the preferences of their customers. In the healthcare industry, most people see the benefit of mobile devices and apps in the ways doctors and nurses use them to improve the quality of patient care. A doctor might check the patients electronic health record on an iPad before entering the exam room, or a nurse could record vital signs on a tablet or smartphone. The benefit of mobile apps extend beyond these uses, however, and also open doors for improving communications between the doctor and the patient and for providing the patient with tools to manage their healthcare.

Apps Improve Doctor-Patient Communication

There are a variety of mobile apps in use for doctors that feature HIPAA-compliant, secure messaging between doctors and their patients. If a doctor needs information from the patient, they can get it quickly, while a patient may send a secure message to a doctor in between appointments to ask for clarification or for peace of mind.

A medical app could allow the doctor to receive lab results from the blood work of his or her patients on a smartphone or tablet. The doctor can view results when it is convenient, and not necessarily only when he or she is in the office. Once the results are received by the doctor, he or she can forward them to the patient via a patient portal or smartphone app with a note that the results look good and what to do next, for example, schedule an appointment in six months.

Doctor apps can be set up to record conversations between the doctor and patient, which is particularly useful when the doctor is delivering bad news. Many patients tend to tune out when they've received some medically bad news, and miss the rest of the information the doctor is sharing with the patient. An app that records the conversation and sends a follow-up transcript or even the recording of the conversation to the patient can ensure the patience receives the instructions and can review them when they're in a better frame of mind to use them.

Apps that allow patients to update their personal information can save time filling out forms in the doctor's office. There is a lot of redundancy with paperwork, and if a patient could scan their insurance card or drivers license and keep it with their EHR it would save time and reduce mistakes.

How Patients Benefit Using Apps for a Medical Practice

Patients of a medical practice can also benefit from using custom mobile apps, including: Patients can request appointments through the doctor mobile app, check the date of their next

appointment, and receive appointment reminders on their smartphones

- Patients can receive pre or post-procedural instructions via mobile phone, so they'll always have them accessible.

- Patients can access their own medical records and history

- Patients can easily share your practice information with their friends, helping to refer new patients to your practice through social media, email, and text messages

- Patients can access driving directions to your practice

THE FUTURE OF THE HEALTHCARE INDUSTRY

The current exchange of information between patient and doctor tends to happen in the exam room, or in the waiting room with the patient filling out forms, but it's unlikely this in-person exchange will continue to last. People are already downloading and using health related apps all the time – for weight loss, health and fitness tracking or even connecting to health monitoring devices like blood pressure or glucose monitors. Offering medical practice apps for patients to use is the next logical step. The early adopters

of patient-facing technology are going to be best positioned as the rapid use of mobile apps and technology expands into the healthcare industry. If you aren't offering services via this emerging technology, you're likely to lose patients and income to practices that are implementing patient-facing apps.

Current Users of Medical Apps

The following hospitals are early adopters of app technology:

RS and patients that helps connect cancer patients with the clinic's clinical cancer trials of new drugs and and other therapies.

- Boston Children's Hospital offers iPhone and Android apps that includes indoor GPS and navigation, lets families management doctor appointments, provides access to lab results and records, a searchable list of doctors and programs, and offers a wealth of information for patients and families including information on hospital food services, parking, support services, and local accommodations.

- Miami Children's Hospital offers an iPhone app with indoor GPS, food service ordering, urgent care wait times, outpatient services and schedules, the option to search for ER and urgent care based on location, and the ability to purchase items from the hospital gift shop.

- The Mayo Clinic offers a comprehensive iOS and Android apps that lets patients schedule appointments, navigation to services and amenities on the Mayo Clinic campus and nearby accommodations and other businesses, access to lab results and records, secure messaging, notifications, and information about the Mayo Clinic and its

physicians and services.

- Hello Health offers a web portal and iPhone app for patients that integrates with the company's electronic records and practice management solutions.

- Apps For Doctors is a company that launched in the U.S. and abroad this spring that offers template-driven Android an iOS app development services to doctors, dentists, and other healthcare professionals.

Patient engagement and federal incentives

While market forces will drive a patient-facing app industry, the federal government is also beginning to put pressure on providers to offer mobile apps.

The federal incentive program for electronic records adoption is built around three stages of "meaningful use" -- ways that providers illustrate to the government that they are actively using electronic records and related systems in order to receive incentive payments. The requirements for stage two, which were finalized last year and begin to go into effect in 2014, include an emphasis on patient engagement, meaning providing patients with access to their personal health data like diagnoses, medications, lab results, and so on. Alongside access to their information, providers will be expected to provide secure electronic messaging between patients and their doctors.

The patient engagement requirements for stage two don't have a mobility requirement, and a rather simple web portal could suffice. The challenge, however, is providing evidence that at

least some patients are actively using whatever system a provider offers. A mobile app -- or at least a mobile version of a web portal -- is likely to spur use, particularly if it provides helpful and convenient features beyond the absolute basics.

Even without the meaningful use criteria, the Affordable Care Act includes provisions that focus on a quality of care model where doctors and hospitals are encouraged to keep people healthy and to discourage hospital re-admission. Many hospitals have already begun to develop follow-up programs that seek to keep patients who have been discharged healthy and on schedule for doctor visits and tests and to be sure their taking medications properly. A mobile app can be a powerful tool for ensuring medication and treatment compliance.

Today only a handful of doctors, medical groups, or hospitals offer patients a mobile app. Those that do, however, offer a glimpse into the future where we can make appointments, review and even add to our electronic records, and communicate with our doctors and care team from anywhere at anytime -- and once patient-facing apps reach critical mass, doctors and facilities without them will be at a competitive disadvantage.

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