



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 needs of their customers. In the healthcare industry, most people see the benefit of mobile devices and apps because of the ways doctors and nurses use them to improve the quality of patient care. A doctor might check the patient's electronic health record on an iPad before entering the exam room, or a nurse might record vital signs on a tablet or smartphone. The benefits of mobile apps extend beyond these uses, however, and also open doors to improve communication between the doctor and the patient while 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 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 doctor receives the results, he or she can forward them to the patient via a patient portal or smartphone app with a note about what to do next, such as schedule an appointment for six months later.

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 them. 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 patient receives the instructions and can review them when they're in a healthier state of mind.

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

How Patients Benefit Using Apps for Medical Practice

Patients of a medical practice can also benefit from using custom mobile apps:

- 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 it's always accessible.
- Patients can access their own medical records
- Patients can easily share practice information with their friends, helping to refer new patients to a practice through social media, email, and text messages
- Patients can access driving directions to a practice

The Future of the Healthcare Industry

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

- **Boston Children's Hospital** offers iPhone and Android apps that include indoor GPS and navigation, lets families manage doctor's appointments, provide access to lab results and records, have a searchable list of doctors and programs, and offer 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 comprehensive iOS and Android apps that let patients schedule appointments, navigate to services and amenities on the Mayo Clinic campus and nearby accommodations, allow access to lab

results and records, have secure messaging, notifications, and also provide information about the Mayo Clinic and its physicians and services.

- **Hello Health** offers a web portal and iPhone app for patients that integrate with the company's electronic records and practice management solutions.
- **Apps For Doctors** is a company in the U.S. and abroad that offers template-driven Android and 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 began to go into effect in 2014, include an emphasis on patient engagement, providing patients with access to their personal health data like diagnoses, medications, and lab results. 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 - a simple web portal will 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 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 as healthy, on schedule for doctor visits and tests to be sure they're 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, and hospitals offer patients a mobile app. Those that do, however, offer a glimpse into the future where patients can make appointments, review and even add to electronic records, and communicate with doctors and the 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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