

Mobile Health is Here Today, not Tomorrow

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In a now-famous, if not profound interview with Conan O'Brien, comedian Louis C.K. decried the widespread adoption of cell phones and smartphones. Louis C.K. argued that they help people avoid feelings of sadness and isolation by offering countless distractions, depriving people of "the ability to just sit there."

There's a silver lining to be found, though, for some. Health information management professionals working on patient engagement have a lot to be excited about in the mobile health adoption realm—which even Louis C.K. might appreciate. At least 95 million Americans used their mobile devices to better their health in 2013, a 27 percent increase from 2012, according to Manhattan Research's Cybercitizen Report. This study found that people with chronic health conditions were most likely to use mobile devices for health information. The top ten conditions included:

1. Cystic fibrosis
2. Growth hormone deficiency
3. Acne
4. ADD/ADHD
5. Hepatitis C
6. Migraines
7. Crohn's disease
8. Chronic kidney disease
9. Generalized anxiety disorder
10. Bipolar disorder

Perhaps more telling is a Digitas Health study that reveals more about where and why users use their devices. Researchers polled 2,000 patients and caregivers with a number of different diseases that fell into five different categories: allergies or asthma, diabetes, gastroenterological conditions, cardiologic conditions, and neurological conditions.

Investigators found:

- 100 percent of survey respondents said they would use an app recommended by their physician
- 80 percent of mobile users used their device while in a healthcare setting
- Patients whose doctors also used a device in an exam room were 30 to 50 percent more likely to use their device in a doctor's office or pharmacy
- 33 percent of respondents said their physician used a mobile device during their visit or treatment.

While these results are likely to encourage patient engagement activists, privacy and security advocates and HIM directors may be alarmed. The majority of electronic health record systems are currently unable to integrate mHealth information into the health record. Though many in HIM feel this would be an issue to solve in the future, these studies show it is very much an issue for the present.

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