Letters ...

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Can We Be Too Connected?

Move over George Jetson. The next best thing to flying cars, but not quite as good as his foldable briefcase-sized car, is here. With the push of a button on our smartphones, we can wirelessly program almost everything in our lives, from programming the lights, heat, and other devices in our homes to recording our heartbeats, cholesterol levels, and other vitals to receiving coupons on our mobile devices as we walk through the supermarket or pharmacy to being pinged that somehow, somebody, somewhere knows we didn't take our medication as instructed.

According to Gartner, a technology research and advisory firm, there will be almost 26 billion devices on the Internet of Things (IoT) by 2020. ABI Research estimates that more than 30 billion devices will be wirelessly connected by IoT by 2020.

In this month's Forum, we explore the expanding world of IoT and look at some of the recent partnerships between pharmaceutical companies and technology companies. We've already come a long way since we reported on Nintendo partnering with Bayer way back in 2011.

According to ON World, of all the verticals in the IoT market, the multi-trillion dollar healthcare market has the largest total potential payoff. Start-up companies with wearable sensor innovations have raised more than $1 billion in venture funding and the majority of these companies are targeting healthcare.

Questions remain, however, whether this perceived good thing is too good to be true. The data collected for healthcare advances could provide immeasurable positive results, but what are we giving up in return? Privacy remains a constant challenge in the IoT era. And these concerns are exacerbated on a regular basis as reports of hacking dominate the headlines.

In a detailed report on the Internet of Things, released in January, the staff of the Federal Trade Commission recommended a series of concrete steps that businesses can take to enhance and protect consumers' privacy and security, as Americans start to reap the benefits from a growing world of Internet-connected devices. The report includes several recommendations for companies developing IoT devices, including building security into devices at the outset, rather than as an afterthought in the design process; training employees about the importance of security; and ensuring that security is managed at an appropriate level in the organization.

Only time will tell if consumers can achieve a level of trust that will allow, as FTC Chairwoman Edith Ramirez noted, for the Internet of Things to reach its full potential for innovation.

In a related article this month, we address the Wearables Craze. Wearables, which are now used by about 20% of the population, are predicted to become as second nature to consumers as mobile phones, providing seamless and valuable data that can improve health outcomes.

For now, my Fitbit is beeping, my Nest needs adjusting, and my wearable shirt tells me its time to do something...if only I could see the small buttons. But I'm sure there is an app for this.

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Taren Grom
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Managing Editor

To be truly patient-centric means understanding the patient experience through the journey of diagnosis and treatment.

ROBIN ROBINSON
Senior Editor

The Internet of Things will grow to the Internet of living and health, yielding opportunities for pharma to be an integral part of a consumer's life.

KIM RIBBINK
Features Editor

Venezuela faces unique challenges, instituting changes to healthcare while dealing with medication shortages.

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