

Programming Better Health: How the Internet of Things Can Keep Us Well

Healthcare professionals have always struggled to keep their patients healthy. The simplest steps can make a huge difference in the overall health of an individual, but the truth is, all of us are guilty of nonadherence to a variety of things. I have light excuses. I'm certainly guilty of missing a few daily teeth flossings — the floss often breaks due to my tight teeth alignment and then is stuck lodged in between my teeth like a bad broccoli leaf after a large dinner salad —and who wants that? Another? I'm super busy so it's easy to forgo daily fitness activities or walks. All of us have probably forgotten to take a regular prescription or daily vitamin, despite the revolutionary invention of Flintstones Complete Gummies vitamins. These are simple good health behaviors and yet they are ignored consistently by most people.

Marketers have come up with every program under the sun to remind patients to stay on a medicine or to regularly practice healthy habits. Strategically, good health adherence comes down to the simple ability to remind individuals of the unquestionable benefits of that adherence. At one time, reminders delivered via regular mail, email, or text message were considered groundbreaking compared with the daily checklists that were once part of large patient starter kits. But now, in a society that places immense value on a “what have you done for me lately” mentality, new developments in technology allow us to advance outreach programs even further because of the way we live our lives, with everyone constantly “connected,” day in and day out.

Connected Ecosystems

Let's be real. Our phones are in our possession — or close by — nearly every minute of the day. These devices are becoming the hub that connects countless other devices as well. It's no secret that smartphones have changed our daily lives. Just having that connected device has become another vehicle to instantly remind us about a variety of things via text reminders, calendar alerts, or other notifications. The Apple Watch advanced connected health even further by being a true “appendage” to the human wrist. In addition, the advancement of the “wearable” now allows a connected device to not only remind us of good health behavior, whether it be exercise or taking



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our medication, but it also has some ability to monitor our health and instantly trigger messages based on those measurements. Connected devices such as scales, refrigerators, and other appliances now sync up with wearables to ensure a customized ecosystem of reminders, measurements, and reporting. Everywhere we go, our connected ecosystems can track and remind us about better behavior. (That said, note to the appliance industry: a “smart” refrigerator would do wonders for me if it reminded me to stop opening it, especially on those days when I don't get to the gym.)

Digitally Programming Behavior

As healthcare marketers, we have the opportunity to work with physicians to digitally “program” health behavior. Based on strategic business rules, automated routines syncing wearables and all connected devices have the potential to orchestrate nearly foolproof behaviors. In some situations, the wearable that's monitoring a metric, like blood oxygen data or activity level, can trigger reminders or automation on other devices. For example, my 97-year-old Uncle Gerard is extremely “connected” via wearable watches and monitors that have been supplied by his physician. Every time he thinks he can sneak in the rare weekend afternoon beer, he gets a friendly call from the Sisters of St. Mary who volunteer at the local Catholic hospital. They are able to

see his biometric data change via his wearable watch and when they do, they give him a ring.

While this might be a little over-the-top for some, a wide variety of opt-in reminder opportunities can prove particularly helpful and beneficial — ordering refills, adjusting music and lighting, or simple physician notifications — when looking to help provide and support all-encompassing patient care.

Connected health technology allows patients to interact with automation or artificial intelligence in a way that can provide instant response.

Based on biometric or other data, that response can be strategically programmed to be error-proof. If a medication has certain indications or safety information, solidified medical and legal responses and behaviors can be preapproved and guaranteed through digital technology rather than personal communication, which is at risk of human error or misinterpretation.

The fact that all interactions within the connected ecosystem are also digitally tracked gives physicians and other approved, interested parties real-time data and results to help further refine and quantify patient response.

Connected health technologies are interacting and working together in ways that are better than ever. We are only going to see an increase in adoption of these technologies by patients and consumers as the vast health benefits from their use become increasingly obvious to the masses.

With technology advancements will come greater “programs” that push healthcare further in the right direction — being and staying well, as opposed to simply “fixing” those who are sick.

Wearables already have the potential to monitor our biometric data and trigger automation with other connected devices, all to help further monitor and encourage better healthcare. But taking it a step further, connected health, when utilized to its full potential, may well become the backbone to total holistic care. **PV**

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