

Wearables Will Soon Be Part of Major Shift In Medical Practice

For a long time the idea of wearable health tracking devices seemed like an idea out of science fiction, but these days the technology is real and cost effective, and wearables will have a big effect on how your practice operates. Here with more insight on the nascent wearable industry is Guest Author Anne Zieger, CEO of Zieger Healthcare. – Abe

For most doctors in private practice, the astonishing growth of health wearables has all but passed them by.

☒ According to a leading health IT group, the use of health and fitness apps is growing 87% faster than the entire mobile industry. That's pretty astonishing for a product category most of us hadn't even heard of five years ago.

But to date, this hasn't changed medical practice much. While physicians may review readings gathered by consumer-grade measurement devices such as home glucose meters, blood pressure cuffs and pulse oximeters, few are integrating data from wearables into their consult, much less integrating that data into their EMR.

The reasons for this are many. For one thing, doctors are creatures of habit, and are unlikely to change their assessment routine unless they are pushed into doing so. What's more, their EMRs are not set up to gather fitness data in a routine and streamlined data. Then when you consider that physicians aren't quite sure what to do with the data – short of a shocking data outlier, what does a physician do with a few weeks of exercise data? – it seems even less likely that they'll leverage wearables data into their clinical routine.

Over the next few years, however, this state of affairs should change dramatically.

Data analytics systems will begin to including wearables data into their calculations about individual and population health. And physicians will be expected to become adept at using wearables to better track the health status of chronically-ill patients. In short, wearables should fundamentally change the way physicians care for patients, especially those at greater risk.

Here's some examples of how this will play out.

Data analytics

In an effort to improve the health of entire patient populations, organizations such Louisiana-based Ochsner Health System are testing Apple's HealthKit technology. Through HealthKit, which connects with Ochsner's Epic Systems EMR, the health system will be able to pull in and integrate a wide range of consumer-generated data, notably input from wearables.

While Ochsner's first big win came from its test with wireless scales for heart patients—which led to a 40% decrease in admissions—the bigger picture calls for clinicians to use wearables data too, leveraging it to track the health of it entire patient base.

Tracking the chronically ill

Though most wearable health bands are consumer devices, used largely by the already fit to help them stay that way, medical device companies are building a new class of wearable devices designed to help clinicians track serious chronic illnesses in a serious manner.

Phillips, for example, announced a few months ago that it had released a biosensor patch designed to track symptoms of COPD,

send the data to a cloud-based central software platform using the patient's wireless device, then route the results to that patient's clinician via a pair of related apps. This gives the physician 24-hour access to key indicators of COPD status, including respiratory rate, heart activity and rhythm and physical activity.

Conclusion: Much more to come

The bottom line in all of this is that wireless monitoring of remote patients has already arrived, and that new uses for data from health bands and other fitness devices are likely to become a standard part of patient care over the next few years.

While no one is suggesting that the data and practical observations a doctor gathers during a fact-to-face medical visit are becoming less value, medical practice is likely rely more heavily on monitoring of wearable smart bands, sensors, smart bands, sensor-laden smart clothing and more as time goes by. Now is a good time to prepare for this shift in medical practice, or risk getting left behind.



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