

Doctors Use Smartphones in their Practice

Written by Steve Marr
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A number of years ago I wrote about how clinics use overseas radiologists to review their X-rays. Philippine radiologists could read X-rays and file a report more quickly. Some saw this as sub-standard care; others believed this was a lower cost improvement in service. My perspective is that in low-demand locations such as small hospitals in rural settings, it is not logical to employ an all-night radiologist to read one or two basic X-rays. In a complicated medical situation, an on-call doctor can come in and work through it. Regardless of our personal preference, this trend continues to advance.

There is another new trend growing in England in which doctors diagnose using a smartphone. You can read the full article here:

<http://bit.ly/2n4PVCI>

The technology seems to work fairly well and is being strongly pushed by Britain's National Health Service. The goal is to allow patients to receive a full diagnosis by smartphone without needing to see the general practitioner. The system includes employing artificial intelligence where the patient keys in symptoms and other information. Based on their input, the system will determine whether the patient should go to the emergency room, a pharmacy or simply go to bed at home.

Patients have an opportunity to schedule a Webcam conference with the physician. While the system seems impersonal and does appear to offer a lower standard of care than visiting a doctor, it is better than waiting the two weeks in the English healthcare system to get a face-to-face appointment with a doctor. If you have what you believe is a serious bout with the flu, isn't it better to receive confirmation by dialing your smartphone than waiting two weeks to see a doctor after the worst is past?

Furthermore, this system promises to reduce cost significantly in securing medical care. As these systems improve, I believe that insurance companies such as Blue Cross and Medicare may require patients to use this type of technology before visiting a physician. While I'm not

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totally comfortable with these changes, most of us will have fewer options.

The promoters of the system say that 95% of doctor visits are unnecessary. What about the complications of the 5%? What if they are mistakenly diagnosed? Recently I had a good friend who experienced a heart attack and was connected to a nurse practitioner who had less experience in discerning medical issues. The nurse practitioner failed to diagnose the heart attack and the symptoms worsened. Fortunately, my friend survived; but the misdiagnosis could have led to a fatal heart attack.

The reality is that we have a healthcare system that is exploding in cost. Many will place tremendous pressure to use technology and other methods to reduce cost. A step I personally took is to obtain a doctor that operates outside of the traditional medical system. I pay a monthly charge out of my pocket for access to appointments. The main advantage I receive is that I can get in to see my primary care doctor usually within the day I call. Of course there is no insurance reimbursement for this monthly charge. However, I feel it is a better option for my long-term health. Each of us will need to work through and understand the changes so we aren't forced into choices we prefer not to make.

King Solomon wrote, "A prudent person foresees danger and takes precautions. The simpleton goes blindly on and suffers the consequences." (Proverbs 22:3, NIV)

In the healthcare industry we need to stay informed and be prepared to take action to obtain the best possible care. When I tell my friends about my alternative arrangements for a primary care doctor, they ask, "Why would you pay another \$1500 that won't be reimbursed through insurance?" My simple answer is that I don't want to be at the total mercy of the healthcare system. Besides, there is a looming shortage of primary care doctors. I want to be in an alternative system now while I'm able because my future options may be limited.

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