



Healthcare and Technology

Mobile technology and how it affects our lives

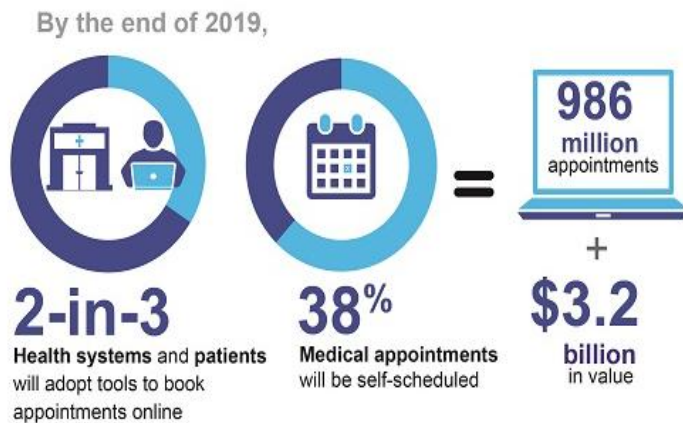
Technology is everywhere in the Bay Area. For many, it is the lifeline to everyday tasks such as meetings, appointment reminders, driving directions and even connecting us with people around the world. With technology at the forefront what impacts does it have on healthcare and our overall health? This article will examine the latest in healthcare mobile technology and how it impacts our daily lives.

When we think of scheduling an appointment with our primary care physician also referred to as a PCP; most of us think of going online and scheduling an appointment through an online portal or app on our smartphone. In fact, according to Accenture’s forecast [1], two out of three people will login online to make, cancel or confirm their doctor’s appointment.

This method of scheduling a doctor’s appointment has been around for over ten years – but only recently saw an increase of online usage when it came to managing one’s health. So what was the turning point:

Accessibility and Convenience.

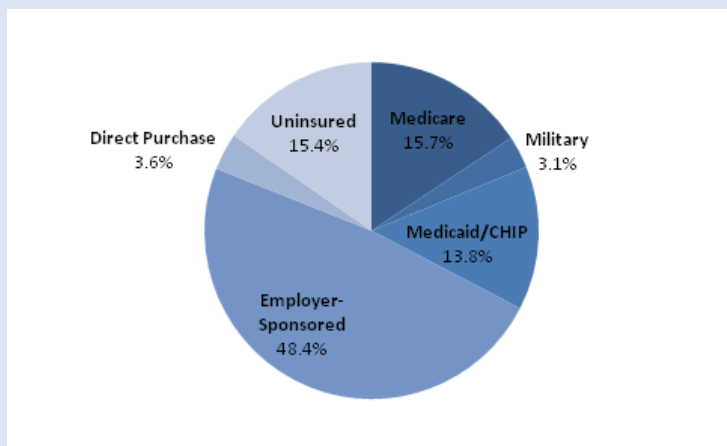
More U.S. Patients to Self-Schedule Appointments



Source: Accenture 2014

According to Doctor Now’s independent committee group, Nat Rosenthal one of the founding partners explains “Technology has always been there – we are just now catching up. When we think ten and fifteen years ago and who was using technology it was the twenty and thirty-somethings always on their phones and iPods – well, that population has aged and what they brought with them is their use of technology. Now in their forties, they are the ones utilizing technology to get things done faster.”

If technology has always been around, why the sudden shift in the way we use it when it comes to managing our health? A study shows, that ten years ago online healthcare was still unknown territory – the diagram below indicates that in 2014 healthcare benefits from employers was nearly 50%~ whereas in 2004 healthcare benefits offered by employers was about 35%. This change in health benefit offerings impacts the way we use technology to manage our health. Health benefits offered by employers are typically corporate and for-profit plans that encourage using a website, smartphone app or automated phone services.



For example, Kaiser one of the leading health insurance plans offered by employers is well-tuned to the digital age. They not only encourage online or phone self-service systems but make it more convenient. Tiffany, a self-employed healthcare worker is a

Kaiser member and recalls how she was introduced to technology as a way to manage her healthcare. “As a mother of two you have to ensure that the decisions you make are the best ones available. When it comes to my healthcare I want a plan that is competitive and uses technology not only to help their members make appointments fast and easy online but uses the advances to further medical research. I have had a PCP with their own practice and their tools and member benefits are not robust like these larger plans.”

Mobile technology is more than just making appointments and accessing your health benefits online – it also enables you to be a better you. How many of us have downloaded a pedometer or calorie counter? These too, are ways that technology is aligning with our healthcare needs. Many of these tools such as calorie counters are often recommended by our PCPs. These

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mobile apps allow us to stay connected with our health goals and communicate with our doctors. If one day, after a doctor’s visit we were urged to walk more and monitor our daily activity – what tool would allow us to monitor such conditions? What would our doctors recommend? If these questions sound familiar then you are not alone. Today, many people in the United States are asking these questions and discovering ways to stay healthy.

“My doctor suggested the Kaiser app” Tiffany explains, “He suggested it for the entire family not just me. He emphasized how it is a good way to manage my appointments for myself and the kids. The app also has a lot of useful tools to promote a healthy lifestyle. There are healthy eating tips and articles that are family friendly. I also monitor what I eat with an online journal provided by the app. In all, the only time I interact with Kaiser is when I check for my appointment and see my doctor. Otherwise, I am completely online and mobile when it comes to managing my family’s healthcare and that’s perfect for my hectic schedule.”

With technology like Fitbit, heart and workout monitors having an intimate relationship with your health is easier and affordable than ever. Although, this doesn’t mean that everyone in the Bay Area uses tech trends to keep an eye on their health. There are some individuals that are not able to access such apps because of their demographics or economical situations.

“When I think of healthcare I do not think of going online and surfing the web.” Carol White, an Oakland, CA resident explains how some of the technical advances the healthcare industry has made doesn’t

appeal to everyone. “If I need to make an appointment I call my doctor and if I am in the neighborhood I stop by his office. Going online is not easy for me; I grew up in a generation where if you wanted something done you pick up a phone or drive downtown to speak to someone in person. Today I see my grandkids on their phones every second of the day. Everyone is on their phone and interacting with people through barriers; but for me I don’t want any barriers when it comes to my health. If I want to manage my healthcare I do it directly with my doctor and his nurses.”

Carol represents about 25% of people in a community who believe healthcare management, on all levels should be done directly with your doctor and their office staff. So the question remains, how effective is technology when introducing it to individuals who are so against it? Is technology needed on the patient’s side to make sure their healthcare is well managed? It depends on who you ask. Some would argue that technology makes it easier to get the hard things done. For instance, you can email your doctor; view lab results and schedule follow up visits. Whereas the other side to this– is that technology is creating a barrier for patients who need more interactions with their doctors and that is simply not healthy.

In all, no matter what side you are on when it comes to technology and healthcare – the accessibility is there for those who want it and toll-free numbers are still in existence for those who don’t. The bigger picture is that healthcare has evolved and no matter how you choose to manage it is a personal choice and one that should be made with you and your doctor.

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