



Insight

MARKET FOCUS: HEALTHCARE

Can Mobile Help Clarify Confusion Over Reforms?

New federal laws have "thrown everything up for question"

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The biggest change in the healthcare industry is the new federal reform laws. Although healthcare reform is targeted more substantially at the insurance side of the industry, Liz Boehm, principal analyst at Forrester Research, says it will still have implications for those who provide care to patients as well. Healthcare reform has "thrown everything up for question," especially reimbursement models, quality of care, patients' rights and responsibilities, and the entire structure of the industry, she says.

"Most of these questions remain unanswered," Boehm notes, pointing to the slow-moving nature of the healthcare industry. "We have a real misalignment of incentives and fragmentation," Boehm says. "Any given patient may be seeing many different providers. They are only working with one insurer, but each of those providers is working with a few different insurers, and all of that makes for a lot of difficulty in putting in technological solutions that may benefit them."

Technological solutions, such as applications in the mobile industry aimed at better communicating with patients—whether it be in feedback or in explanation of coverage—are popping up intermittently, though.

One provider is On the Spot Systems, a mobile service provider that developed Survey On the Spot, a mobile survey application, with patient satisfaction in mind. As patients prepare to leave the Transitional Care Unit (TCU) at Signature Healthcare Brockton Hospital in Boston, they are handed an iPad with a survey that takes only a few minutes to complete. Once the patient fills out the survey, the app gives TCU real-time feedback on the quality of service that was just provided to the patient.

Not only does Signature Healthcare Brockton Hospital receive immediate insight into the patient's satisfaction, but also the chance to rectify any sore points right away.

"If a patient responds poorly to any of the questions, the director of nurses and I get an instant email from Survey On the Spot informing us of the poor response, and it allows us to follow up with the patient before they leave the facility and hopefully rectify the negative perception that has been created around an issue," explains Mike Baldassarre, administrator at TCU. "The feedback is instantaneous, which I see as the greatest advantage of the system."

Baldassarre describes the patient response to Survey On the Spot as "overwhelmingly favorable," with many intrigued by the novelty of the iPad and grateful that they don't have to fill out additional paperwork.

Geoff Palmer, the Survey On the Spot healthcare mobile app developer, echoes Baldassarre in advocating the real-time feedback as the strength of the app. "The use of easy-to-use mobile devices allows healthcare providers to get real-time information that they can respond to effectively, rather than getting the information several weeks after the fact," Palmer says. "Delivering customer satisfaction in any industry requires that the business or healthcare institution builds a system and culture that values customer feedback and actively utilizes it to improve their customers' experience. Enabling faster and more accurate collection and reporting of this information allows organizations to be much more proactive in solving problems, understanding root cause issues, and, most important, celebrating and acknowledging members of their team for delivering a great experience."

Boehm acknowledges "the energy" surrounding mobile apps and agrees that the voice of the customer absolutely belongs in healthcare, particularly when moving forward with new communication models. She considers successful applications to be more of the simple variety, though, such as those that communicate wait times and appointment reminders. But she points out that there are deeper issues currently up for debate about hospitals and hospital processes that treat patients as "a cog in the wheel," rather than a customer around which things should revolve.

"I wonder if a simple app like that gets at some of the deeper issues," Boehm says. "Similarly with health insurers, when they put things on mobile, I sometimes scratch my head and say, 'Well it didn't make any sense on paper, it didn't make any more sense when you put it on the Internet, what's going to make it make sense in the mobile environment?'"

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