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Consumer engagement and the PHR: Still awaiting the killer app(s)

Only 2% of consumers are currently using a PHR, according to Revolution Health CMO, Jeff Gruen at the World Health Care Congress on a panel with Graham Pallett (Carol) and Jeff Rideout (Health Evolution Partners).
So why are these tools not being used?

Some initial thoughts:

- Awareness

- Concerns around security and privacy

- Data needs to be "easy" and ubiquitous

- Compelling or "killer" apps

Interest in the PHR is clearly renewed, with consumer oriented development occurring due to efforts by tech titans Microsoft (HealthVault) and Google (GoogleHealth). The real question is whether this is technology leading the wagon or if there are real unmet user needs creating opportunities that the technology can begin to address.

There are clearly different (and competing) objectives for PHRs from the consumer, provider, and payor perspectives.

Consumers have a number of different needs that could be addressed by a PHR:

- ER in coma

- Questions/ clarification from doctors and care providers

- Followup information

- Appointment reminders

- Coaching

- Storage of data/ condition over time to give to provider

• Peace of mind

• Access to information (e.g., history, vaccine records, end of life instructions)

• Pharmaceutical safety/ coordination

• Ability of care providers to take care of loved one/ relative

Given the number of needs and potential user needs, it appears that we don't have clarity around the initial consumer "beachhead" and the minimum functionality required to create real value. How much of the clinical record needs to be captured and even auto-populated? What degree of certainty needs to exist around the data? How transportable does it need to be? Do clinical or claims records even capture the information relevant to consumer needs?

For now, we have a platform looking for an application-- it will be interesting to see in what direction (if any) the development of the PHR unfolds. Which company will create the Visicalc or "Facebook" style apps that create value on top of the platforms is the question for the entrepreneurs and Venture Capitalists…

This post is cross-posted to the World Health Care Blog

Posted by Vijay Goel, M.D. at 8:23 AM