

Will Telemedicine Be The Next Killer App?

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At the American Telemedicine Association's annual meeting recently the results of a national survey were revealed. The survey of health care and information technology professionals, sponsored by Intel, found that a majority of decision makers believe that the emergence of telehealth will have a major role in improving the care for the globally aging population, aka the "baby boomers."

According to the study telehealth solutions are currently used by two-thirds of health care professionals with an 87 percent satisfaction rate. These professionals believe that improved patient care, more complete clinician access to patient data and early identification of health issues are some of the biggest perceived advantages for telemedicine adoption.

We are all aware that staying with our current "reactive" health care system approach cannot be sustained for much longer and there is an increasing need to adopt a more "proactive" model — one that will provide for more personalized patient care, in addition to providing medical professionals with the most current patient data.

Although there are arguments against moving toward telemedicine, such as the current methods of reimbursement and the apprehension about learning a new technology, according to the study, there already is a strong movement evolving to make telemedicine become a reality.

Enter "wireless communications." The convergence of wireless technology, social networking and medicine could definitely change the direction of health care in a positive way. Wireless medical devices have already demonstrated that they can improve health care, ensure more personalized treatment and reduce the margin of error.

The California Healthcare Foundation, a think tank, estimates that two-thirds of American physicians already have smart phones. And more than one-third of doctors are using a software program for mobile devices and laptops that provides instant information on drug interactions, treatment recommendations etc. Eventually this software will be able to access electronic health records (EHRs) via mobile devices - predicted to be the next "killer" wireless application.

Wireless health care devices are becoming "omnipresent" in hospitals according to

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Published on Surgical Products (<http://www.surgicalproductsmag.com>)

Kalorama Information, a market research firm. It estimates that the market for such devices and services in the US alone will grow from \$2.7 billion in 2007 to \$9.6 billion in 2012. Telemedicine has already created changes in today's health care industry by moving care from the hospital to the home in certain situations, achieving more patient centered care at a reduced cost.

The majority of consumers, health care professionals and service providers are in favor of

implementing telehealth models. As an industry, let's get behind this movement and swiftly resolve the technical issues that exist when implementing wireless healthcare models so that we can all reap the benefits and reduce the strain on our current health care system.

What's your take? E-mail nancy.maas@advantagemedia.com [1]

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