Medicine's Mobile Future

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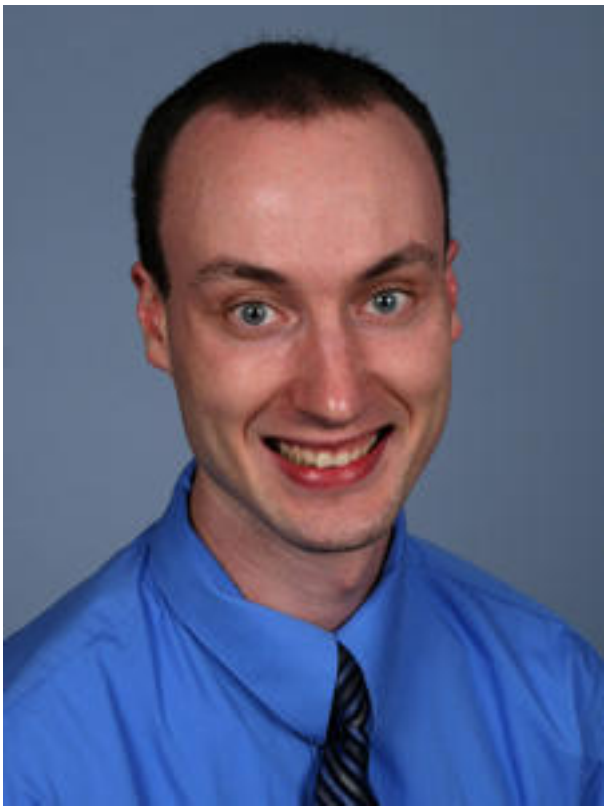
Some people excel at living in the moment. Dr. Eric Topol is not one of those people.



It is safe to say the forward-thinking San Diego-based cardiologist has a penchant for questioning the status quo. While this attitude has led some of his colleagues in the medical profession to label him as brash, it has also allowed him to rise to prominence as both a physician and proponent of a revolutionary, cutting-edge form of medicine.

It all began a few years back when Topol spoke out against the profitable painkiller Vioxx because he thought it to be unsafe. While Vioxx was eventually removed from the market, Topol’s strong position did not endear him to some in the medical profession. Largely due to the controversy surrounding the drug, he decided to leave his clinic in Cleveland and make a fresh start in southern California.

However, the experience has not tempered Topol’s forward-thinking mindset or stopped him from embracing a new crusade.

The longtime physician has grown weary of costly, unnecessary tests and screenings. He has also become frustrated with inaccurate diagnoses and the rising cost of healthcare. As a result, Topol now incorporates the relatively new but

growing field of wireless medicine into his daily practice.

In fact, he is now one of its foremost proponents. Topol believes wireless medicine holds the key to making healthcare more efficient and less costly in the future.

For example, his modified iPhone, approved by the FDA in December and available for $199, can produce a cardiogram or portable ultrasound for a patient. The phone can also conduct other tests and screenings quickly and easily, so they don't have to be scheduled at a later date. Now he can conduct tests immediately upon a patient’s visit and share those test results in real time. Furthermore, the technology allows Topol to be able to remotely monitor patients. This has helped lead to quicker diagnoses and more effective prescriptions.

Wireless medicine has the potential to revolutionize healthcare because the general public is already familiar with the “equipment” physicians such as Topol use to practice it.

Furthermore, app developers are hard at work trying to create new software apps for physicians to use. However, this potential means nothing without eventual adoption, and it is not yet clear whether surgeons and other healthcare professionals are ready and willing to embrace it and leverage it for the benefit of both the healthcare industry and its patients.

Is wireless medicine just a passing fad, or will healthcare professionals be able to find ways to leverage powerful hardware and software tools to better prevent or treat injury and illness? Time will tell. In the meantime, we should monitor its growth and hope it realizes its immense potential.

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