



Apps blur line between smartphones, medical devices

November 23, 2010

For something from Harvard Medical School, an article in the November issue of Harvard Health Letter is remarkably dumbed down, but it does contain a statement that pretty much explains the state of smartphone apps in healthcare: "While a lot of health and medical apps provide little more than an alternative to pen and paper for note taking, an increasing number are harnessing the phones' computing power, cameras, audio and video capabilities, motion sensors and GPS systems to create new ways to help you manage your health."

And then there's this fact that many within healthcare are grappling with: "Apps are a new frontier of medicine--a territory still largely uncharted, unregulated, and unstable. No one knows exactly how many apps there are, how well they perform or whether they are worth their prices, which may vary from day to day." But clarity is coming. "As phones and their apps become smarter and smarter, more clinicians are incorporating them into their practices. In a few years, filling a prescription may be just as likely to involve a session in the apps store as a trip to the pharmacy," the Harvard Health Letter says.

Sign up for our FREE newsletter for more news like this sent to your inbox!

Following a long list of mostly consumer-centric apps, the article notes that apps have "come of age" now that the FDA has approved the WellDoc DiabetesManager System to be sold as a medical device. "DiabetesManager came under FDA scrutiny because it differs from earlier apps in one important respect: it not only collects and analyzes data, but also offers users medical advice and coaching based on the results," the story says.

DiabetesManager should be available for purchase from several app marketplaces--we're guessing the Apple App Store and Google's Android Market--early in 2011. As we've already reported, WellDoc is working on similar products for asthma, cardiovascular disease and cancer.