

# The Washington Post

## Happtique helps doctors prescribe apps to patients

August 28, 2012

By Mohana Ravindranath

Doctors may soon be prescribing smartphone apps to their patients along with their medication.

There are thousands of health-related apps available for download today on smartphones and tablets (by some estimates there could be as many as 40,000, though no formal count has been done). These apps are as varied as programs that make it easy to count calories, monitor diabetes, or check heart rates.

The sheer number of what are known as mHealth apps can pose a challenge for health practitioners, who often don't have time to keep up with the fast-evolving field.

Enter [Happtique](#). The New York-based enterprise, a subsidiary of the [Greater New York Hospital Association](#), is launching a kind of curated app pharmacy featuring programs it has vetted to meet certain standards.

"There is little barrier to entry in building an app," said Happtique Chief Executive Ben Chodor. "The biggest problem we were finding in the marketplace was. . .app clutter. People were saying, 'Hey, I don't know which one to use.'"

Currently, there is little regulation of the industry. The [Food and Drug Administration](#) only regulates medical mobile applications that accompany medical devices.

To complement the FDA regulations, Happtique has developed a certification process that evaluates an app on the basis of operability, privacy, security and content, according to Chodor.

"We've created an objective process to evaluate whether an app does what it claims to do," Chodor said.

Happtique is launching a voluntary program in the fall through which developers can submit their apps to be reviewed for certification. The idea is that the certification would serve as a kind of seal of approval.

The certified apps would then be offered through a service called mRx that would allow health practitioners to prescribe the programs to their patients.

mRx is itself an app that can be loaded on a doctor's smartphone or tablet. Once a suitable health aid is located, the doctor can select the "prescribe" command to send the app to a patient by e-mail.

In its pilot period, mRx features apps related to several specific areas including cardiology, endocrinology, orthopedics, physical therapy, rheumatology and fitness training. Some can transmit a patient's medical data to the doctor's smartphone — this could help doctors keep tabs on patients between visits.

Between now and mid-September, Happtique will be enrolling medical doctors and licensed or certified health practitioners in mRx, after which the practitioners will be allowed to prescribe apps to patients.

Sometimes, these apps come from larger pharmaceutical companies — like Merck and Pfizer — but just as often, they come from small, independent and lesser known app developers, Chodor said.

Baltimore, Md.-based mHealth app developer [WellDoc](#)'s app, DiabetesManager, will likely be featured on mRx's platform once it secures Happtique certification, according to Chodor. The FDA-approved app has been shown in trials to effectively manage patient glucose levels. Patients enter their food intake history, glucose levels and medication information — this data is sent to experts in WellDoc's network, who can analyze and compile the information, finally passing it on to the patient's doctor at predetermined intervals.

While many small businesses could enter the mHealth market, WellDoc Chief Strategy Officer Chris Bergstrom warned that mHealth app development is expensive. On average, it can cost \$24 million and take a couple of years to get FDA clearance, according to a 2010 study by Stanford University and the Medical Device Manufacturers Association.

Bergstrom said being located near D.C. was helpful in getting the app cleared — WellDoc staff worked directly with the FDA as well as the National Institute of Health to discuss how the government could aid mHealth.

Chodor estimates a sizable market for mHealth apps — about half of baby boomers who own smartphones said they would buy medical mobile apps, especially when recommended by a doctor, according to a poll taken by Mitchell Research and Communications.

Eventually, Chodor hopes Happtique could integrate with a doctor's Electronic Health Records data entry process, so at the point of prescription a doctor could simply click a button on the screen and quickly select an app to prescribe along with medicines.