InformationWeek Healthcare

AT&T Names Doctor To Lead Healthcare Expansion

Geeta Nayyar becomes the telecom's first chief medical information officer, charged with increasing its $5 billion business with new mobile health, telehealth, and cloud services.

By Ken Terry
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AT&T's healthcare division has appointed Geeta Nayyar, MD, MBA, a practicing rheumatologist, as its first chief medical information officer as it continues to expand its presence in the healthcare industry.

Nayyar had hands-on experience in implementing an electronic health record (EHR) for the faculty practice at George Washington University when she was studying for her MBA there. She still practices and teaches in GWU's department of rheumatology. Prior to joining AT&T, she served as principal medical officer at Vangent, a consulting firm.

TechWebTV catches up with Whisper Systems' CTO and co-founder Moxie Marllinspike to discuss and demo WhisperCore -- a mobile security solution that brings BlackBerry-like centralized enterprise-grade security to Android devices.

Randall Porter, assistant VP of AT&T ForHealth, told InformationWeek Healthcare that Nayyar "will guide the overall AT&T ForHealth strategy by providing industry expertise in evidence-based medicine, health outcomes, disease management, and wellness."

Porter added that it's important for AT&T's executive team "to have a physician's perspective ... [in] bringing real-life, on the ground, clinical viewpoints to how technology can be applied in healthcare delivery today ... CMIOs who practice can better assess realtime changes in the marketplace."

Meanwhile, AT&T already has a very robust, $4.9 billion business in healthcare, and it's laying the groundwork to increase its market share. In June, AT&T launched a pilot of Welldoc's DiabetesManager to see whether the mobile health (mHealth) tool can improve the outcomes of patients with diabetes. The pilot study participants are all employees of AT&T and the Health Care Service Corp., which operates Blue Cross Blue Shield plans in Illinois, Texas, New Mexico, and Oklahoma.

AT&T, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the American Association of Diabetes Educators (AADE) recently launched an mHealth initiative to improve self-management training of diabetic patients. The program will start with a pilot in an underserved community in Texas. AT&T will contribute $100,000 to the AADE to fund the initiative and will provide 150 smartphones with voice and data plans for the patients, diabetes educators, and other coaches.

AT&T announced in June that Detroit's Henry Ford Health System plans to use AT&T Medical Imaging and Information Management to store cardiology medical imaging studies. Likewise, Alabama's Baptist Health System will use AT&T to hold its 2 million-plus archived images. This is part of an industry trend to store images in the cloud.

AT&T recently began piloting a new telehealth tool called AT&T Telepresence Clinic, Porter said. The components of this technology include Cisco HealthPresence, connectivity to the AT&T Business Exchange, and AMD Global Telemedicine medical peripherals. St. Joseph Health System in Orange

County, Calif., is testing the Telepresence Clinic, which will "address the needs of patients who experience financial, social, geographic, and other barriers to care," he explained.

In the area of health information exchange, the company has offered its AT&T Healthcare Community Online platform for a few years. According to Porter, John Muir Health in northern California and MuirLab, a reference laboratory, recently agreed to deploy AT&T Healthcare Community Online. The service will enable cloud-based, secure transfer of data between the MuirLab's Lab Information System and its client hospitals, he said.

Overall, Porter added, "We plan to continue to increase our efforts to develop and deliver advanced IT solutions in all four areas of AT&T ForHealth--mHealth, telehealth, cloud-based healthcare solutions, and healthcare information exchange."

Find out how health IT leaders are dealing with the industry's pain points, from allowing unfettered patient data access to sharing electronic records. Also in the new, all-digital issue of InformationWeek Healthcare: There needs to be better e-communication between technologists and clinicians. Download the issue now. (Free registration required.)