

## Telecoms Pushing for Mobile Medicine Payoff

The future of healthcare could bring a big payoff

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**Telefónica** (NYSE:TEF) has developed a knee brace embedded with motion sensors that lets doctors monitor a patient's rehabilitation remotely after they've been discharged from the hospital. That's here and now. Within the next 20 years, one cellular phone pioneer predicts that many of us will be wearing a patch that will monitor our health in real time. Further down the line that same device will likely be embedded into our bodies, alerting us as well as our physician when there's a problem.

These are other developments all fall under the burgeoning field of telemedicine. The discipline promises to dramatically alter the way health care is delivered, connecting patients and providers in ways that don't rely on face-to-face contact.

The developing field holds the promise of increasing efficiency, lowering costs, expanding access to care and improving patient outcomes, according to one industry consultant. These are the reasons the global telemedicine market is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of nearly 19%, reaching \$23 billion by 2015.

It's no surprise then that a variety of players are working furiously to capture a piece of the growing pie. Foremost among them are the giants of the telecom industry. **AT&T** (NYSE:T), for instance, has a number of initiatives underway and appears to be the most aggressive of the carriers. The company is introducing a new "smart slippers" product to track gait abnormality and falls and a diabetes management system using the WellDoc DiabetesManager.

AT&T also is teaming up with medical device manufacturer eCardio Diagnostics to embed machine-to-machine wireless data connectivity into heart monitors for near-real-time monitoring of heart patients. The eCardio system is meant to allow patients to recover from heart surgery at home instead of spending days in expensive, uncomfortable hospital beds. Clinicians can access data from the cardiac monitors through any computer or smartphone with an Internet connection,

**Verizon** (NYSE:[VZ](#)), meanwhile, recently invested in Mass.-based BL Healthcare's expansion of its remote health care solutions, including those underway with Verizon. And mobile operator **Sprint Nextel** (NYSE:[S](#)) has joined Verizon in providing 3G connectivity for BL Healthcare's telemedicine devices.

The interest extends outside the U.S., where telecom companies also seek new revenue sources to offset the commoditization of its core businesses of voice and broadband. **Vodafone** (Nasdaq:[VOD](#)) showed its commitment to the business by establishing a mobile health, or m-health, unit at its headquarters in Newbury, England. Earlier the company took a stake in t+Medical, an Oxford University spinoff that uses mobile technology to monitor health conditions.

Other cellular carriers and other telecoms with plans for mobile healthcare include **France Telecom's** (NYSE:[FTE](#)) Orange, Sweden's Doro and, from Japan, **NTT DoCoMo** (NYSE:[DCM](#)) and KDDI.

It's predicted that most carriers will be pursuing partnerships with established companies that have been selling their technology for years by providing healthcare apps, software and services. The telecoms also still need to demonstrate the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of their technologies to gain the key reimbursement endorsement. If they are successful, the payoff could be huge.