



## **New mobile programs hope to bring the clinic to the patient**

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Consumer mobile applications aren't writing prescriptions just yet, but they also aren't making patients sit around in a waiting room.

While FDA is sorting out what kinds of mobile apps or programs might constitute a medical device (and thus require approval), scientists and technology firms are cranking out new diagnostic tools that could eventually make some waiting rooms obsolete.

Tariq Sadid of St. George's University of London is currently developing a chip that, when connected to a mobile phone, could be used to test saliva, urine or blood for sexually transmitted diseases, according to various reports yesterday. That test is still several years away from the commercial market, but other mobile health tools, like Sanofi Aventis's iBGStar blood glucose meter – which plugs directly into an iPhone or iPad - could hit the US market much sooner.

WellDoc, a technology provider for chronic disease management, will launch a diabetes management system for smart phones in early 2011, with the full sanction of FDA. Chris Bergstrom, chief strategy and commercial development officer for WellDoc, said the system, which uses a behavioral algorithm to suggest tips to users with diabetes, qualifies as a medical device under FDA's definition. The program received FDA approval in August, and does not include advertising. "The system is designed to deliver the best patient coaching according to the best clinical evidence and their physicians care plan, and thus could not be biased towards a particular therapy," said Bergstrom in an email.

On the prospects of pharmaceutical marketing in the mobile arena, Larry Mickelberg, Euro RSCG Life Worldwide's chief digital officer, said mobile presents "a blur between marketing and [the provision of] a service." Euro RSCG released survey data on mobile and smart phone use among consumers (here, in pdf), which found that 47% of smart phone users said they would be more likely to use online sources for health management, if those sources were available in mobile app formats. Just 17% of basic, non-smart phone mobile users agreed with that sentiment. "Marketers can't just promote [in the mobile space], they have to offer real help" to patients, said Mickelberg.

Data from the Pew Research Center's Mobile Health 2010 report, however, found that just 17% of cell phone users surveyed use their phone to look up health or medical information, and only 9% have downloaded health apps to their phones. Surveys for the Pew study were conducted by telephone between August 9 and September 13 of this year, and included 1,000 interviews in English and Spanish, according to the survey.