

WellDoc, AT&T enter diabetes monitoring software partnership

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Telecommunications heavyweight AT&T (Dallas) is teaming up with WellDoc (Baltimore) to distribute a mobile health software solution aimed at reducing the spiraling costs of managing diabetes.

AT&T plans to deploy the WellDoc DiabetesManager through an internal initiative in 2011.

"I think this is a landmark recognition that the telecommunication's industry wants to do business with the healthcare industry," Chris Bergstrom, chief strategy & commercial development officer at WellDoc, told *Medical Device Daily*.

Bergstrom said that AT&T will help the company deliver its solution through most wireless networks and cellphones.

WellDoc's software-based system supports patients and offers automated clinical coaching and behavioral algorithms driven by real-time patient data. Suggestions and coaching all comes back in the form of a text message.

The company said that the DiabetesManager system supports medication adherence and securely provides for the capture, storage, and real-time transmission of blood glucose data and other diabetes self-management information.

This information is then analyzed by the company's proprietary automated expert analytics system, which identifies trends and then delivers relevant educational and behavioral patient coaching and provider decision support, thus enabling effective lifestyle and medication adjustments. The system even gives a quarterly report to the patient's primary care physician so health and wellness plans can be more in depth.

AT&T will expand to other disease areas, including: heart disease, asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and oncology.

"Most likely we'll be moving into other disease states in 2011," Bergstrom said.

The company said that statistics indicate that the market for this kind of diabetes solution could be huge.

According to the Deloitte Center for Health Solutions, nearly 50% of consumers have expressed interest in home monitoring devices to check their condition and communicate the results to their doctor. Mobile technology, through the use of messaging and feedback via mHealth, can play a key role in helping individuals with a chronic disease like diabetes make the appropriate lifestyle choices.

The WellDoc system's web-based enterprise tools also enable providers and disease management organizations to more effectively oversee larger patient populations as the system automates and increases patient engagement.

AT&T's strategy is to extend its core communications capabilities to provide mHealth solutions, and as part of the multifaceted relationship with WellDoc, AT&T will jointly market and sell AT&T-WellDoc mHealth chronic disease solutions across the entire healthcare ecosystem, including payors, self-insured employers and disease management organizations. The WellDoc solution complements AT&T's portfolio of technology solutions for healthcare customers and gives enterprises a new mobile toolset to help manage populations.

Operationally, AT&T will expand and scale WellDoc's solution by utilizing AT&T's mobility expertise, providing application hosting and creating a highly secure infrastructure to host critical health data. Commercially, AT&T will also support the solution with sales and marketing, customer care, provisioning and billing.

As reported in August, WellDoc became one of the first mHealth solutions to receive U.S. FDA 510(k) clearance (*Medical Device Daily*, Aug. 3, 2010).

The application was also reviewed by the FCC as it is a software geared toward telecommunications.

The approval came about a week after the a panel meeting where the FDA and FCC vowed to work closely together to regulate and be aware of mobile health solutions. The two signed a memorandum of understanding (*MDD*, July 27, 2010).

WellDoc executives attended the meeting and said that they were impressed with the two agencies working together and that the mobile health (mhealth) sector could only grow from the relationship.

The partnership between both agencies paved the way for AT&T and WellDoc to work together and could set the precedent for future collaborations between healthcare companies and telecommunications providers.

"I think we both approached each other," Berstrom said of the relationship with AT&T. "We were certainly aware of one another. Both companies were surveying the landscape to see who was out there and who would best meet their needs. We feel honored to partner with AT&T one of the biggest, if not largest wireless operators out there."

He added that the partnership hinged on being a historical moment for both industries.

"To me this partnership is really amazing, because you have the healthcare and telecommunications industry, two of the largest markets throughout the globe, coming together to make the world a better place," Bergstrom said.