



AT&T helps developers connect apps to health systems

February 13, 2012

By Brian Dolan

In the fall of 2010, AT&T announced a partnership with WellDoc to bring the mobile health startup's DiabetesManager app and service offering to its enterprise customers. Ever since then the mobile operator has been searching for other "best of breed" vendors to help bring to market. During that "exhaustive search" AT&T realized that both its customers and the developers it had met with were in need of access to better tools to improve mobile health applications, Eleanor Chye, Executive Director, Mobility Healthcare and Pharma, Mobility Product Management, for AT&T Business Solutions told MobiHealthNews in a recent interview.



Most apps are disconnected from healthcare systems. Most apps aren't able to share data with hospital information systems. Most apps don't even talk with each other.

That's why this week AT&T launched a beta version of its AT&T Developer Center ForHealth, which aims to help mobile health app developers to build apps that are connected to the healthcare system and that make use of publicly available data sets. AT&T expects the developer platform to "streamline, accelerate and lower costs in the development, deployment and management of enterprise-grade mHealth applications," according to its press release.

There is a real need from both sides — mHealth developers and our customers want to unleash the siloes in which data resides in," Chye said. "This will enable developers to create mashup applications and umbrella applications. Up until now, each time an app developer or someone with a device peripheral wants to upload or connect that data to a legacy health IT system — whether it's a health insurer or hospital — that is extremely expensive. There are huge barriers to that. So, [at AT&T] we said why don't we create that connection and bring to bare our knowledge on how to create that infrastructure."

The beta version of the the new developer platform includes cloud-based developer tools, an ability to aggregate clinical and wellness data from apps and devices, HIPAA-compliant data storage, and an API gateway and mobile client that can be embedded into any third party app to enable apps to link together. AT&T is funding five health startups to go through StartUp Health's academy, Chye said. AT&T is also working with Health 2.0 on its developer challenges to make AT&T's developer platform the "platform of choice" for developers participating in the challenges, she said.

AT&T said a number of additional features are in the works, including a data integration engine that will link apps to enterprise data systems in hospitals, practices, health insurers and other healthcare institutions; an API gateway that enables developers to leverage AT&T services and other third party services like texting or location-based services on a pay per use basis; and, finally, enterprise billing and customer care tools.

Cloud based services. Innovations in database management. Innovations in API gateways. Identity management. Application to application sharing of data. We built all that with healthcare in mind. That's the genesis of this open developer suite of tools with common infrastructure to bring these faster and cheaper while linked. Now end customers can get access to all of these applications. Can get applications that are linked together and to their backend systems.

Chye told MobiHealthNews that the platform will be free to use for developers. AT&T is "not going to touch" developers' intellectual property. The operator plans to generate some revenues from the platform for its paid services, including the HIPAA-compliant storage service, texting services, location-based services, and for providing the secure connections to healthcare institutions' systems.

"That's going to be a much lower cost to go through us then have the developer pay to [connect to each healthcare system] one-by-one," Chye said.

AT&T is already working with a number of groups who put on healthcare hackathons and developer challenges, including Health 2.0, StartUp Health, HIMSS, and Rock Health, to seed the platform with developers. Chye says more than 100 developers have already signed on to — in the very least — "take a look under the covers." The platform will have connections to some of the device makers and app developers who already make APIs available, including Withings, Fitbit and others. It will also launch with connectivity to some of the applications AT&T has built itself.

"That includes an app AT&T built called MyHealthFamily," Chye said. "With it, a parent can look at the healthcare across their entire family. We have built the integrator on the database so it can connect [to healthcare IT systems] using the HL7 protocol. We could go through a hospital and connect through HL7. We can also connect through [continuing care document] data. We are building over time our repertoire of connectivity points."

AT&T, however, hasn't yet begun discussions with healthcare providers and HIS vendors. Chye expects to begin those discussions next week at HIMSS. "It's really early days," she said.

For more on the new AT&T developer platform, read the press release below.