



Insurer: Apps may help unravel complexity of health insurance

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By Brian Dolan

David Passavant, the senior director of consumer innovation at UPMC Health Plan, which is owned by the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, sees the advent of mobile health apps as an important tool for unraveling the “incredibly complex and confusing” world of health insurance for consumers.

In an interview with Smart Business, Passavant noted that by the end of 2012 most health insurance companies will offer apps that enable members to search for healthcare providers and contact their insurer. Other features that basic apps from health plans will offer include personal health records access, location-aware provider search, and virtual member ID cards. The next generation of apps offered up by health plans will include real time updates on claims status, tools to understand “costs and quality of care”, personalized health tips, and various health trackers.

Passavant said that “the opportunities these devices provide are endless” and that health plans are only now “just scratching the surface”.

Passavant said that “soon it will be possible to include, for example, technology that could collect blood glucose level readings and send them directly to a member’s physician.” This service, of course, is already possible. WellDoc’s DiabetesManager enables it. Telcare’s recently FDA-cleared, wireless-enabled blood glucose meter also makes it possible. The even more recently FDA-cleared iPhone peripheral, the iBGStar from Sanofi and made by AgaMatrix, is another device that enables sharing of blood glucose data with physicians right from the patient’s mobile phone.

Perhaps the most promising quote from Passavant was this:

“Once the use of mobile technology is accepted and members are able to let us know how they want to use it and how it can best fit their needs, we will evolve.”

University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, which owns UPMC Health Plan, has developed a couple of iPhone apps already. ChildrensPgh is a free iPhone app developed by UPMC that offers a symptom navigator, medical advice, and more for parents. UPMC also created, UPMC EMS Navigator, an app to provide emergency medical services staff with an up to date set of clinical guidelines.

Be sure to check out [Passavant’s insightful interview in Smart Business](#) for more on UPMC Health Plan’s mobile health strategy.

