Get Ready for a Flood of Connected Medical Devices

Terms:

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The world has become connected. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn connect us to friends, family and associates. We now share information and experiences in real-time. Smart phone apps and exercise trackers log our health habits and congratulate us just for walking through the grocery store.

In medicine, some mobile medical devices can now collect and securely transmit patients’ medical and health data to health care professionals. Offsite assessments and necessary consultations with physicians are now possible. The world of remote patient monitoring has arrived, and it will continue to grow.

So just what is remote monitoring? It’s a form of digital technology that allows patients to use mobile medical devices to perform tests outside of traditional patient care settings. By 2025, Grand View Research estimates [7] the U.S. market for remote patient monitoring devices to reach $700 million. In development are devices for diabetes management and applications for vital sign monitoring, dementia and falls, congestive heart failure, COPD, infertility and many other conditions.

Helping to drive this trend are payers who are incentivizing people to be proactive about their health care. Payers are increasing reimbursement for remote monitoring and this may help keep patients out of the hospital, which benefits both the patient and the payers.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services already reimburses hospitals for remote monitoring of patients with heart failure. In 2001, the cardiovascular segment was among the first to adopt remote monitoring with an FDA-approved wireless remote monitoring system for implanted cardiac rhythm devices. In 2018, an estimated two million patients now use medical devices to transmit data. Other patients can benefit too such as those with COPD or other conditions that can be monitored and have data transmitted to caregivers.

Among those who will benefit the most are the elderly, disabled and chronically ill populations. Thanks to remote patient monitoring, these and other patients may be regularly assessed in their homes without compromising quality of care. In addition, remote monitoring may also decrease the cost of care.

New products on the market

Two examples of new patient monitoring technology are the recently available FreeStyle Libre from Abbott and the Dexcom G5 blood glucose monitors. Both products feature a patch that continuously monitors blood glucose levels and eliminates finger-stick sampling (cool). Both also feature wireless transmittal of information to the patient and physician. The data transmission provides both with earlier warnings, and thus, the ability to better manage blood sugar levels (even cooler). These are just two of many examples of new medical devices that couple patient convenience with quality care and potentially lower costs.

The long and short of it? Remote patient monitoring is rapidly expanding. Expect to see more devices containing these capabilities soon. Hospitals are encouraged to begin or continue their efforts to embrace remote monitoring, especially as health care shifts its focus to preventative care and population health. The relatively slow adoption by hospitals and health systems likely is due to data security and patient confidentiality.

However, a technology tsunami is building, and I’m issuing my own weather advisory: Hospitals need to develop and implement adoption strategies quickly because the coming deluge of devices that enable remote patient monitoring will likely be unstoppable.
About the author. As director of strategic initiatives and new technology for physician preference sourcing operations, Lukowski leads the team’s strategic support, innovative program development, new technology assessment and education initiatives. His extensive experience working with both domestic and international medical device suppliers, health care providers and markets gives him the insight to assist hospitals in developing strategies for cost reduction through supplier negotiations, physician relationship development and practice change management.