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Wearable Technology: Making Health Addictive

The hype around wearables is deafening. I say this from the perspective of someone who saw their application in chronic illness management more than 15 years ago. Of course, at that time, it was less about wearables and more about sensors in the home, but the concept was the same.

Partners HealthCare has been committed to technology-enabled care for nearly two decades. Over the years, we've seen growing signs that wearables were going to be all the rage. In 2005, we coined the term 'Connected Health' and the slogan, "Bring health care into the day-to-day lives of our patients," shortly thereafter. About 18 months ago, Partners Connected Health launched Wellocracy, an online community designed to educate consumers about the power of self-tracking as a

search has shown that people check their mobile phones upwards of 150 times per day. So how do we leverage mobile health to make health and wellness as addictive?

Making health addictive is really about harnessing the power of our fascination with mobile devices, particularly smartphones. Could we induce permanent behavior change if we put a personalized, relevant, motivational and unobtrusive message in front of you some of those many times you check your mobile device?

Today, most healthcare app development is still confusing education with inspiration. We are learning a great deal about how to empower patients to self-manage their health, and what to do with all of this patient-generated data. The one critical element we must get right is how to

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tool for health improvement. All of this attention to wearables warms my heart.

Sarah C.P. Williams has written an informative feature story in this issue that clearly defines what is required to make these technologies applicable in healthcare and what to do with all of the patient data being collected. Based on our clinical research at Partners, including connected health programs in chronic disease management, adherence and wellness, we have verified many of the principles mentioned in this article.

To add further perspective, there are a few additional concepts that I believe we must get right in order to harness mobile technology. Re-

'sell' health to consumers and keep them coming back for more. Again, it's got to be personal, motivational and ubiquitous.

Looking ahead, we must ask the question, is the future of patient-generated data migrating to the mobile phone or will it move into the realm of micro-sized wearable seeds, ingestibles, injectables, band-aids and the like? There are also many more health sensing applications than just pure activity tracking, such as continuous heart rate or blood pressure monitoring.

The power of sensor-generated data in personal health and chronic illness management is simply too powerful to ignore. □