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Can Wearable Technology Boost Patient Engagement?



As technology continues to play a critical role in today's healthcare industry, providers have started to offer new ways for patients to become more involved in overseeing their health. By implementing electronic health records and patient portal systems, providers are enabling their patients to access their visit summaries and lab results anytime, anywhere. This modern technology aims to improve the way patients manage their health and interact with their physicians, but patients are not limited to the technologies provided by their doctor's office.

Wearable devices are more than just accessories that tell you how many steps you walked in a day—they can be beneficial for monitoring one's health, resulting in improved outcomes. Thus, more and more patients are embracing the technology. In fact, a recent survey from [Accenture](#) shows that the number of consumers who use health-related wearables increased from nine percent to 21 percent between 2014 and 2016—and of the 21 percent, 76 percent of these consumers followed their physician's recommendation to use wearables to track their health. With all the different wearable devices on the market today, how do patients know which tracker they should invest in, and after they've made their decision, what will it mean for their health?



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Wearables hold many benefits for patients, especially those with chronic conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity. Making the decision to invest in a wearable device is often the first step in playing an active role in one's health. When a patient begins utilizing it, and the data is integrated with an electronic health record (EHR), these devices offer patients another channel to stay connected with their physician. This integration also provides physicians with easy access to patient data that can be reviewed regularly. Think of it like a mini-physical each time a patient syncs their wearable and the data uploads to the patient portal!

Additionally, these devices provide another level of awareness— by tracking day-to-day exercise and diets, patients can be more conscious of how they're tracking against their goals, which can potentially be a source of motivation for them to not only accomplish their goal, but also maintain a healthy lifestyle. While these devices are helpful in monitoring one's health, they are most beneficial when patients use devices that are best suited for their needs. For those looking to lose weight and maintain their cardiac health, step trackers may be the best way to help them benchmark their daily steps in order to

set goals that are attainable and impactful. On the other hand, step trackers may not be the best fit for those who are diabetic or have high blood pressure.

For providers, the integration between wearables and EHRs enables us to make more informed decisions. Patients look to us for guidance, and the more insight we have into their daily activities, the better we can assess any issues and provide the best recommendation for treatment. When data from wearables is uploaded into an EHR, we have the ability to track patient activity remotely to see how proactive they are and gain a better understanding of how these activities may be impacting their health. For example, a patient whose blood pressure is borderline-elevated during visits may not necessarily have such high levels on a daily basis. If my patient is using a device that specifically helps manage blood pressure, I can regularly track this information when they are outside the office. Additionally, the ability to view their activity through the EHR system allows me to send messages of encouragement, or alert them to a potential health risk in the case of an emergency.

While the data from wearable devices is helpful for physicians to monitor patient activity outside the office, it also proves to be valuable during appointments. Having such data handy allows me to have more insightful discussions with my patients in real-time so we can work together to set goals that will help improve their health, and also decide whether treatment plans are necessary based on how their daily activities are impacting their health.

In the next year, the industry can expect to see a growth in wearables adoption. As a primary care physician, I often discuss the benefits of these devices with my patients, regardless of whether they have a chronic condition or not. As the industry continues to shift towards value-based care, patient engagement is becoming a bigger focus. When a patient is more informed about how their daily activities are impacting their health, they are more likely to make adjustments that will lead to healthier decisions. Wearables are resources that provide valuable information to both patients and their providers, which can further enhance the patient-physician relationship.

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