

The impact of healthcare IT on patient engagement and outcomes

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In today's digital age, consumers rely on their mobile devices to control many aspects of life— with just a touch of a finger, they are able to manage their bank accounts, make online purchases, request car services and so much more.

It's clear that many are not only willing to embrace the access their mobile devices provide, but they expect it. So the question becomes, how are we leveraging technology to bring this concept to the healthcare industry to encourage patient engagement?

Technology plays a critical role in today's healthcare ecosystem with the overall goal of improving patient outcomes. It has the power to connect doctors and patients and to streamline how they access health information through a variety of different channels, including patient portals, mobile health (mHealth) apps and wearable devices. We're seeing healthcare and technology rapidly converging in a number of ways that give patients more transparency, control and autonomy when it comes to the management of their health. In fact, it's [proven](#) that when patients are engaged in their own healthcare, they experience fewer medical errors and ultimately have better outcomes. In today's digital era, it's important to understand how we can utilize technology to boost patient engagement and as a result, positively impact patients' health outcomes.

In order for patients to truly be engaged in their health, it's more than just making sure they receive an annual physical or call the doctor's office when something feels abnormal – it is also about how we can provide our patients with technologies that will enable them to have more access to not only their own medical records, but access to their physicians as well.

Patient portals are one tool we use to engage more efficiently with our patients. Such portals provide a secure communication pathway between our doctors and their patients, allowing users to be more proactive in the management of their own health. From having the ability to review their personal health records (PHR) and lab results, to requesting refills of authorized prescriptions, patient portals play a huge part in boosting patient engagement and thus, improving patient outcomes. Patient portals can also be accessed on patients' mobile phones, enabling them to manage their health records on-the-go while also allowing them to have a more personalized experience. The convenience of having that data in a patient's pocket gives them flexibility which, in turn, leads to better health outcomes and peace of mind.

Patient portals can also help patients stay on track. In addition to keeping physicians informed of serious health changes, patients can also leverage our portal to schedule reminders or book an appointment. Simplifying our patient's medical experience only makes them more inclined to take an active role in managing their health.

mHealth apps also have a substantial impact on patient outcomes. At Grove Medical Associates, we are taking our patient portal technology to the next level by offering mobile solutions. This step forward reflects a larger trend in the healthcare IT industry that has driven hospitals to update existing technology to keep up with ever-changing consumer needs. Now more than ever, people look for convenience and that means enabling them to have their medical information at their fingertips. Through the use of mobile apps, patients have immediate access to their medical records, but – more importantly – they also have the ability to stay connected to their providers by sending messages, requesting prescription refills and viewing lab results.

These days, doctors are in a unique position where we have the power to engage patients in the age of mobility – and because of that, patients feel empowered to take a more active role in their health. In fact, according to a

study conducted by research firm [Kelton and Makovsky Health](#), 66 percent of Americans would use a mobile app to manage health related issues if it was made readily available to them.

Further, through mHealth apps, patients using smart medical devices or wearables can monitor their activity and health, including blood pressure, blood sugar, weight, caloric intake, and more. The data can then be imported directly into an EHR, creating a fuller record of each patient's health and lifestyle management.

mHealth apps give patients the opportunity to be proactive in the management of their own health. After all, we live in a digital era where people have the ability to access all sorts of information at all times. Why shouldn't the same principles apply for your personal health data?

Wearable devices offer another option for patients who want to directly manage their health. The functionality of wearables goes beyond just tracking a patient's daily activity for their personal use. Data stored in these devices can be useful for doctors as well. According to a [PricewaterhouseCooper survey](#), adoption of these devices is around 20 percent and that number is only projected to rise. When these devices are integrated into EHRs and patient portals, the information is then accessible to physicians, equipping us with further insight into patients' daily activities which can then help them make more informed health decisions.

Let's take a look at an example of where this is applicable the most: If a diabetic patient wants to manage their blood glucose level over a period of time, they can use a glucometer that can wirelessly communicate with their smartphone app. This app can then download all of those readings from the patient's glucometer and, once the information is available on the app, they can immediately share it with their physician. Or, alternatively, next time the patient visits the physician's office, they can walk through the readings with their doctor so that they can make better decisions regarding their health.

Ultimately, when patients are engaged and more informed with their own health, they're more likely to adopt healthier lifestyles. Technology is a resource that can collect personal medical information across a variety of different channels that enable patients to securely and conveniently communicate with their physicians. Technology provides physicians with greater insight into their patients' activities beyond annual office visits, which will allow them to offer more informed recommendations to improve outcomes. With the advancements in technology within the healthcare industry, it is important to take advantage of the tools available to make a healthier population.

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