

In the Belly of the Beast - Industry Trends and Opportunities

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After twenty plus years in the belly of America's healthcare system beast, I am skeptical but not cynical. I no longer look for or believe that there is a silver bullet that will "fix" healthcare. The system is just too complex and fragmented. It's hard to see how there could be a lever that, when pulled, will align all the practices, incentives and systems into a unified model of care and funding.

I do believe, however, that when individuals become engaged in man-

aging their own health, the industry has a better chance of managing the system. In this column, I attempt to find and showcase those trends and opportunities that I believe can actually make a difference and move us toward creating a healthier world and community along with a sustainable healthcare system.

Like many of you, I was transfixed by the events of the "Arab Spring." Apart from the human drama, which remains gripping, the role that mobile technology and social media played in enabling these dramatic events awakened me to the potential of these potent new tools.

I saw how powerful mobile technology had become. How it connected individuals and created the platform for change. As with most dramatic change, the outcome is difficult to predict but the power mobile technology played in enabling it is certain.

The question this phenomenon sparked in me was this: Could mobile technology enable the badly needed communication across the healthcare system? Could it connect the people, providers and carriers by

providing the platform for change? Could it also enable a revolution in healthcare?

Mobile technology, more than any technology or tool I've seen, meets people where they are, on their terms, in their day-to-day lives. It travels with them, becomes their lifeline to the people, information and transactions that are important to them. And this opportunity for personal connection is increasing exponentially. A recent Neilson study projected that one in two Americans with cell phones will have a smartphone by Christmas 2011. In 2008, that number was only one in ten. In just three years smartphone ownership went from 10% to 50% of cell phone owners, a group which is itself growing. The opportunity to connect people, providers and carriers through mobile technology is now.

Slalom Consulting is a leader in mobile technology and has been for many years, across many industries. Our excitement about the far-reaching effects mobile technology can have in healthcare was galvanized most recently by a project with Group Health. As Justin Jarrett, Sla-

lom Consulting's Project Manager on this project, expressed it, "We were delighted to be the technology partner for Group Health Mobile. But, more than the technology, what excited our team was the opportunity to make a patient's life easier. The outcome exceeded our expectations. The business strategy and member input drove the technology, as it should; allowing us to deliver benefit immediately to people when they needed it."

Group Health iPhone members now have a healthcare system in their pocket. They can quickly schedule appointments, check wait times, view lab results, self-diagnose symptoms, call the consulting nurse, access their medical records, and participate in a host of other activities that will help them manage their health...all from the convenience of their smartphone. No need for embarrassing phone calls from a cubicle or taking time off to make healthcare arrangements or tracking down your last tetanus shot.

We are seeing this effect across the industry as clients incorporate mobile technology into their efforts to engage people both clinically and in their business dealings. Locally, Slalom Consulting worked with SonoSite, the world leader in point-of-care ultrasound devices, to better connect to the new tech-savvy generation of medical professionals. Through a "pull" strategy application, SonoAccess, they now stream educational videos to customers and prospects via their iPhones. The videos offer expert guidance on ultrasound techniques, video case studies, a gallery of clinical imagery, and even a reimbursement guide. It was so successful that the CIO migrated SonoSite's sales force to iPhones to enable on-the-spot demos.

Mobile technology is enabling change worldwide by connecting individuals to each other and to issues that are important to them. Across delivery systems and carriers there is one constant – the people. Sometimes those people are patients,

sometimes health plan members, and sometimes providers. Even the most skeptical sees the potential mobile technology presents for engaging these individuals across our fragmented system. Who knows--the one constant in that fragmented system may be the individual and their smartphone.

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