

Special Audio Report Transcript

Headline: FDA Looking Into Use of Technology Tools To Help People Self-Diagnose, Obtain Medications

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I'm Kelly Wilkinson with a look at FDA's move to consider whether technology can be safely used to help expand the number of medications available without a prescription. This is a special report for *iHealthBeat*, a daily news service from the California HealthCare Foundation.

FDA recently held public hearings on whether consumers should be able to use online questionnaires, patient kiosks or other technologies to conduct self-screenings and obtain certain medications that currently require prescriptions.

FDA is still in early stages of considering such a change. But the use of such technology would allow certain drugs used to treat conditions such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, asthma and migraines to be made available over-the-counter.

Marcie Bough is senior director of government affairs at the American Pharmacists Association.

(Bough): "Technology can help supplement the education to a patient, can help provide information about a drug product and the logistics to implement something in the new paradigm to health care providers as well."

Pharmacists like Charles Daniels say expanding over-the-counter drugs is worth considering. Daniels is a professor of clinical pharmacy and pharmacist-in-chief at the University of California-San Diego.

(Daniels): "Broader access to both diagnostics, as well as treatment for patients that are currently not being seen regularly is an important opportunity that might make a difference. We know there are a lot of patients that just never get to see a physician and therefore whether it's high blood pressure or diabetes or whatever, they may not even know that they have a chronic disease that is treatable."

Daniels says if FDA moves forward with the idea, there are a lot of considerations.

(Daniels): "How to make sure that the corner pharmacy has not only the right level of expertise -- cause pharmacists are very well trained to be able to provide that expertise -- but also able to be available on quick notice for a patient that's there and essentially what the financial model is that would support that too."

Another consideration is the technology itself.

Daniels says the automatic external defibrillator is an example of technology that is very smart and widely accepted.

(Daniels): "If a device or devices could be put together than can build that same level of smartness in, and there is a reasonably accessible expert that can help answer the questions for those things that are not obvious, then it might be a way for us to get patients that are currently not being treated, treated faster."

But there are plenty of concerns.

Sandra Adamson Fryhofer is a general internist and chair-elect of the American Medical Association's council on science and public health. She says no matter how capable technology is, it can't replicate an in-office visit when a doctor might notice other health problems. And she adds that many new technologies like mobile apps don't work for older patients ... who have high rates of the chronic conditions that FDA is targeting.

(Fryhofer): "You have to figure out the technology that's going to work for the person. And certainly a big chunk of the patients we're talking about with these chronic diseases are older patients. So I don't think that some of the technology is going to be as successful for them as it might be a younger generation that grows up with these new devices and this new technology as they get older."

Meanwhile, other experts warn that consumers might have trouble understanding the large amount of medical information that patient kiosks and other new technologies could provide.

If FDA moves forward with this new paradigm, pharmacists would be crucial in the process. One possibility is that before buying a medication, consumers would be required to talk with a pharmacist or have a diagnostic test. Another scenario is that pharmacists would help customers verify their diagnosis or decide whether a certain medication is right for them.

FDA is accepting written comments on the topic through May 7.

This has been a special report for *iHealthBeat*, a daily news service from the California HealthCare Foundation. If you have feedback or other issues you'd

like to have addressed, please email us at ihb@chcf.org. I'm Kelly Wilkinson.
Thanks for listening.