

Special Audio Report Transcript

Headline: Health 2.0 Conference Focuses on Patient-Centered Technology To Promote Wellness

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TEXT:

"Patient-centricity" was the buzzword at the fifth annual Health 2.0 Conference in San Francisco as developers showed off dozens of new gadgets to help patients play a bigger role in managing their own health. This is a special report for *iHealthBeat*, a daily news service from the California HealthCare Foundation. I'm Deirdre Kennedy.

Many of the health IT products unveiled this year were more like what you'd see at Mac World or the Consumer Electronics Show. There were Web-based tools, smartphone applications and body sensors that track the user's every movement, breath and mood shift. Christine Robins, CEO of BodyMedia, demonstrates her company's latest device:

(Robbins): "It all starts with the arm band. It gathers five thousand data points a minute off of four on-body physiological sensors. I might pull out my handy cell phone, which I always have with me, and take a quick look at my dashboard and see how I'm doing against my targets for the day."

Users can also graph their activities over weeks or even months. Steve Downs -- chief technology and information officer at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation -- says making patients more aware of how their bodies are doing can motivate them to take better care of themselves and keep them out of the doctor's office.

(Downs): "We think increasingly, the ability for people to capture data about how they live their lives has the potential to transform and redefine how they think about health and how they take action to improve health."

But knowledge alone isn't enough to get people to choose healthier behaviors. Most of the new Web-based tools give users personalized feedback based on their treatment plans and medications. So a diabetic who has a high blood sugar measurement will get a text reminding him to take a walk or get information about healthy snacks.

Behavioral scientists say long-term engagement is best achieved through social interaction. And almost all of the new apps integrate a community element. Jonathan Attwood is CEO of a company called Zamzee, which has created a device that aims to get teens to be more active.

(Attwood): "You get one of these, a Zamzee meter; this converts your movements into points. It powers this online environment and makes a game out of your movement."

Community support is the main concept behind the gamification of consumer health care. Game developer Chris Hewett said he was inspired to create the wellness game Mindbloom to reach the millions of people who are online playing Farmville. Instead of earning points to buy crops and animals, Mindbloom players learn to nurture their own personal tree. The branches represent important aspect of the player's life -- like health, creativity, spirituality and relationships. Hewitt explains how it works:

(Hewett): "We have sun and we've got rain. The sun represents inspiration. It represents the why, why do I want to be healthy. And the rain represents action. What am I going to do today to improve the quality of my life?"

The user makes the sun glow by selecting inspirational images, quotes, music and messages. They make it rain by clocking up beneficial activities or behavior changes like working on better communication with another person. Mindbloom just signed a deal with Aetna, which, company officials say is switching from being an insurance company to being a "care-enabling" company.

Farzad Mostashari, national coordinator for health IT, says the new focus on prevention is a result of payers switching to bundled care models.

(Mostashari): "That is the single most exciting thing I've seen today is that there's going to actually be a market for keeping people healthy and for keeping people out of the hospital. I think that's an accurate reading of where health care finance is going."

He says as more tech companies get into the consumer health market, patients will have a lot of different choices for accessing and controlling their health data.

(Mostashari): "And, ultimately, those that add value to the consumers are going to be the ones that succeed and that's a good thing. The cautions, if any, that I have for the developers of these innovative new applications and services is to really think about what's the problem that they're helping to solve."

He says developers who want to make their apps useful to health care providers and health plans will need to think about how user-generated data can be integrated into the clinical workflow and how to make their apps work within the culture of health care, not just the business of health care.

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 Deirdre Kennedy. Thanks for listening.