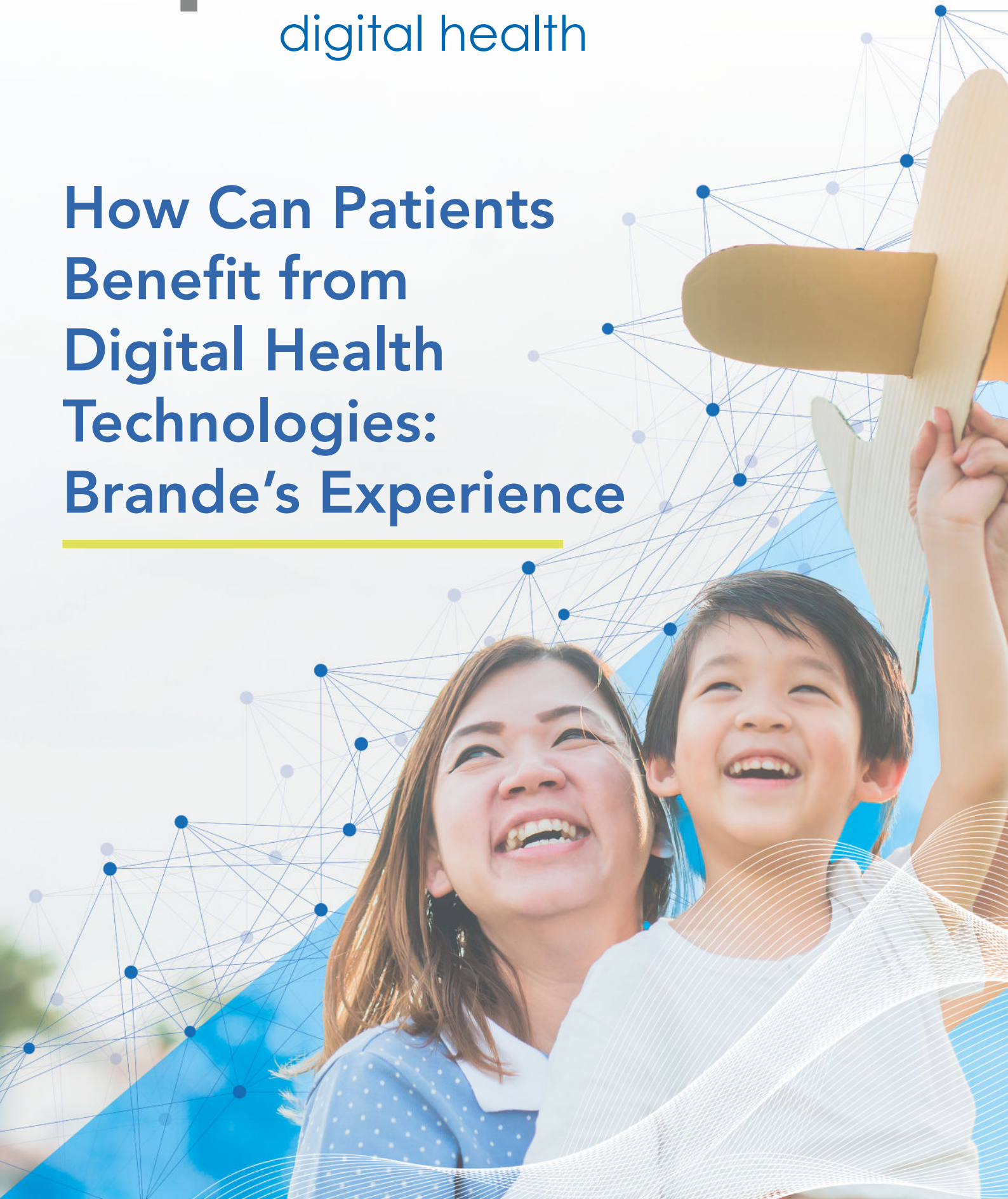# Aptar
digital health

How Can Patients Benefit from Digital Health Technologies: Brande's Experience

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A cancer diagnosis is a time of tremendous anxiety. Patients face a care journey of many medical procedures, an evolving care plan, and unexpected side effects. There are also questions about where and when the patient will receive care, and how much it will cost.

Brande Pearson faced all these questions at the same time. What began as a routine doctor's visit for persistent pain in her shoulder led to a scan that revealed basal cell cancer and an immediate appointment for a biopsy. After 15 procedures to remove the cancer, Brande is in recovery – and she credits her healthcare provider's digital health app with helping her manage the complexity and uncertainty of her treatment.

These apps, referred to as digital health solutions, are used in concert with medications and medical devices to provide patients with evidence-based interventions and recommendations. Leading apps also enable patients to communicate with their care teams and connect with patient support groups.

In a recent webinar entitled "*How Digital Health Can Empower Cancer Patients?*", Aptar Digital Health investigated the perspectives of three stakeholders in the health arena: the person with cancer, the healthcare provider and a person from the life science industry. Brande discussed the role of her digital health app in guiding her from the time of her cancer diagnosis through treatment, surgery, and recovery. She also provided perspective on how stakeholders at health systems and life science organizations can improve the user experience and increase buy-in from patients like her.

Meeting patient needs with digital health

Patients face a range of challenges when they first receive a cancer diagnosis. Digital health applications can address these needs in many important ways.

- **Information**. A cancer diagnosis often comes as a surprise. Patients may not know what cancer does to their body, and they may not understand how treatment works. Plus, the shock of receiving a diagnosis makes it difficult to retain information at the point of care.

WEBINAR: How Digital Health Can Empower Cancer Patients?

Brande Pearson
Digital Health User and Former Cancer Patient

Lisa Kiblinger, NP-C, RN, CDCES
Global Director of Medical Affairs, Internal Medicine, Aptar Digital Health

Mario Lacouture, M.D.
Onco-Dermatology, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

Sophie Opdyke
SVP, Global Marketing Oncology, Merck & Co.

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Digital health apps can be a repository for this information so patients can access it on their own time.

- **Emotional stress**. Likewise, a diagnosis is overwhelming. It means a patient's life will never be the same. Support from mental health professionals who are available for virtual visits is critical for managing the stress of living with cancer.

- **Social support.** Family support is valuable for cancer patients, but it's not enough. Patients benefit from connections to people with similar treatment experiences and quality of life concerns, as this helps them understand what lies ahead in their patient journey.

- **Financial accessibility**. Cancer treatments are expensive, and the burden of paying for them can contribute to stress. Assistance with financial support – not just finding it but also submitting applications for it – is vital for easing the burden faced by patients in need.

- **Timely communications**. Patients with cancer often need to report symptoms or ask questions outside of in-person appointments. They may also want information from drug makers. The ability to "chat" with the care team or drug makers through a digital app leads to faster responses and improves the patient experience.

- **Empowerment**. Patients don't want to feel alone during cancer treatment. The right digital therapeutics app can foster connections with their care team, provide access to educational and financial resources, and help patients feel more involved in their care.

Improve financial accessibility

Find social support

Get timely answers from professionals

Deal with emotional stress

Be equipped and empowered

Get information

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Brande's experience: Initial diagnosis

Brande's independent oncology specialist recommended the digital health application to her during her initial appointment. Her care team helped her download the app, set her up with her username and password, and navigate through the app. In less than 30 minutes, Brande was able to enter her medical history and insurance information and send her first message to her care team. "*I had previous experience with digital tools, but it was nothing like this. I had no issues at all. It was an easy process.*"

Before her first surgery to remove the cancer cells, Brande used the app to complete her patient intake forms. Through correspondence with her care team, she also lined up the prescriptions she'd need to aid in her recovery.

Brande admitted she was scared the day of her procedure – and understandably so. Fortunately, the ability to take care of administrative tasks in advance proved to be valuable. Not only was the check-in process streamlined, but Brande's nerves were calmed. "*When I arrived that day, everyone was taken care of. There wasn't any more paperwork. It was great peace of mind.*"

Brande's experience: Treatment

Brande isn't the type of person to search for medical information on the Internet under normal circumstances, and definitely not while going through cancer treatment. "*It only would have made me even more anxious,*" she said.
The digital health app helped ease this anxiety by helping her stay in regular contact with her care team. If Brande had questions, they'd send her educational resources and other information – and Brande knew she could trust it, since it was coming straight from her care team. The ability to communicate was especially valuable when Brande was having difficulty with pain management following one of her procedures. After reporting this

"It was a great piece of mind"

symptom to her care team, she received a new prescription almost immediately.
"*It was like being on an instant chat.*"

Brande's experience: Opportunities for improvement

Overall, Brande had a good experience using her digital health app. She shared her story to show other patients how technology can help guide them through cancer diagnosis, treatment, and recovery – and to help the healthcare industry make the experience even better.

"*I believe the role of patients is to provide feedback on anything they felt should have been there that wasn't there, anything that annoyed them, or anything they didn't think was necessary,*" she said. The biggest piece of advice Brande had for improving the digital health experience was helping

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patients understand what to expect. She offered three specific examples.

1. Brande's treatment involved 15 separate procedures to remove cancerous tissue. Knowing that multiple surgeries may be necessary would have been valuable. In particular, she said she would have benefitted from getting to read or hear a personal story from a patient who had gone through something similar – or even connect with that patient.

2. Additional details about the surgery itself would have offered peace of mind, Brande said. It's easy for a patient to think of a surgery as just "g*etting cut open*," but knowing things like how long the procedure will take and what surgeons are looking for makes it easier to prepare both physically and mentally

3. Similarly, setting expectations about recovery is helpful. "*It would have been good to know that this is where you should be at any given point, that you may not heal quickly, and that's OK*," Brande said. For example, patients would benefit from resources explaining how much pain normal, how much and what type of discharge from the incision site is normal, and what size of a scar is normal.

Conclusion

As the healthcare industry looks to help patients with cancer through a difficult and uncertain care journey from diagnosis through treatment, digital health can play a pivotal role in improving quality of life, clinical outcomes, and peace of mind. This is more likely to happen if applications are designed, developed, and implemented with the needs of patients front and center from the very beginning. From there, the healthcare industry needs to get patients to see the benefits of using digital therapeutics. Brande said the best way to encourage patients to use apps is to make it the standard for managing cancer care.

"*You need to have physicians tell patients, 'This is the way we're doing it,'*" she said. "*Once patients start using the app, they will quickly see that it is their friend, and it makes things much easier to manage. Plus, the more you use it, the better it is for you.*"

According to the International Agency for Research and Cancer, there were 20 million new cancer diagnoses in 2020 and the agency projects more than 30 million diagnoses annually by 2040. In many parts of the world, health systems are struggling to provide patients with the personalized care that cancer patients need. This unmet need will only grow over time and digital health offers a new perspective on this issue.

"Once patients start using the app, they will quickly see that it is their friend."

About Aptar Digital Health

Aptar Digital Health creates end-to-end solutions to enhance patient experiences every day, leveraging a holistic ecosystem of digital interventions. Amplified by an industry-leading portfolio of products and solutions, Aptar Digital Health's offerings combine mobile and web apps, connected drug delivery systems, onboarding, training and advanced data analytics services to actively empower patients and create a positive treatment journey.

Aptar Pharma's Digital Health division is part of AptarGroup, Inc., a global leader in drug and consumer product dosing, dispensing and protection technologies.

To listen to the entire testimonial of Brande,
watch the webinar:
"How Digital Health can Empower Cancer Patients"