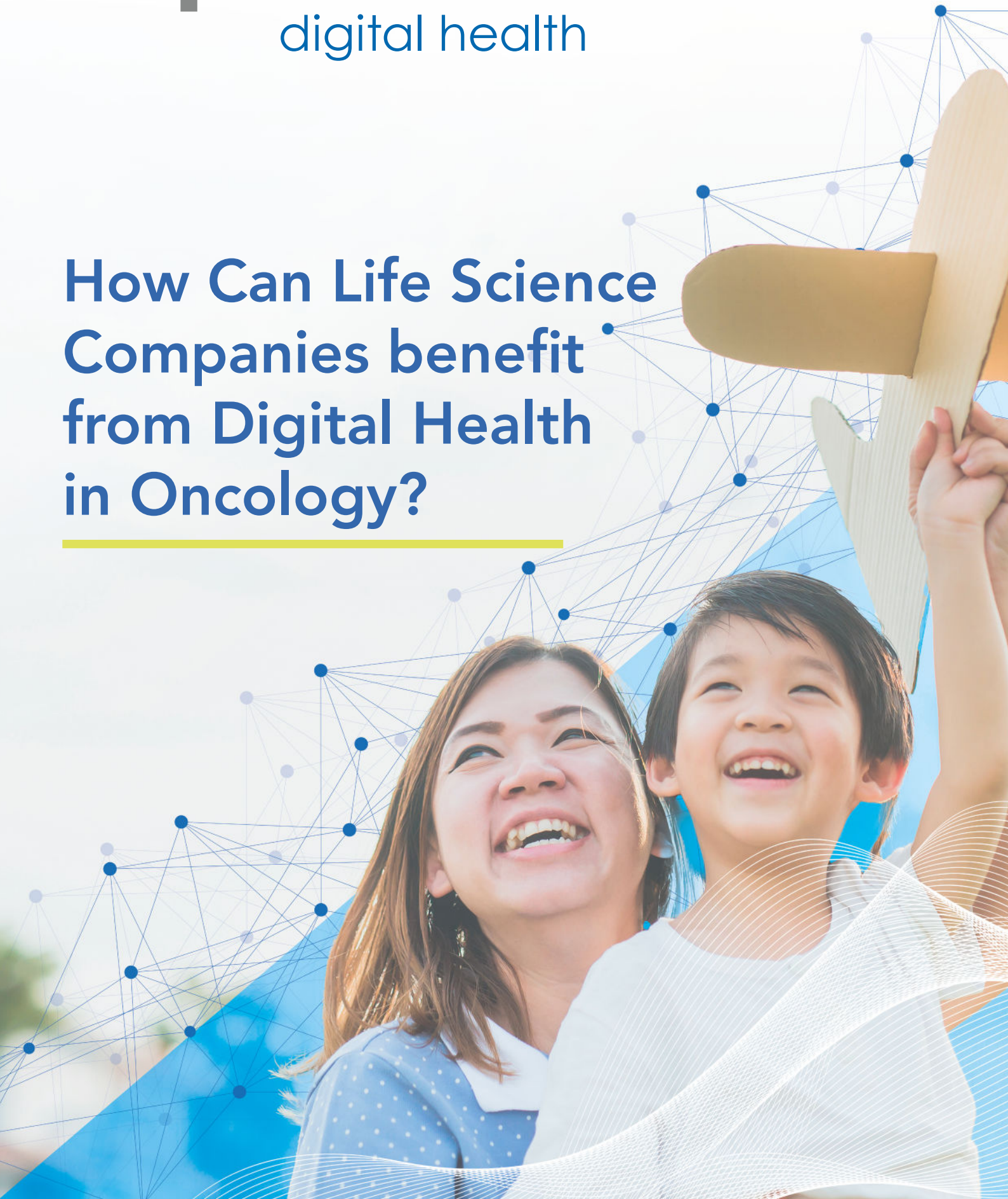


Aptar



digital health

How Can Life Science Companies benefit from Digital Health in Oncology?



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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.

These questions impact more patients every year. 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.

Digital health solutions help patients manage the complexity of going through cancer treatment. These software applications 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.

Along with improving patient education and engagement, digital therapeutics provide life science organizations with a valuable tool for strengthening partnerships with healthcare providers and patients. In a recent webinar titled 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. Sophie Opdyke, Senior Vice President of Global Marketing Oncology at Merck, discussed how digital health tools are positioned to enable life science and provider organizations to optimize the experience through the often-difficult patient journey of cancer treatment.

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

WEBINAR: How Digital Health Can Empower Cancer Patients?



Brande Pearson

Digital Health User and Former Cancer Patient



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Sophie Opdyke

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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. 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

Improve financial accessibility



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foster connections with their care team, provide access to educational and financial resources, and help patients feel more involved in their care.

A foundational solution for reaching patients where they are

The main value proposition for digital therapeutics is the capability to reach patients with the right information where and when it's most important for them, Opdyke said. The key to this success is understanding the patient's journey from the initial diagnosis of cancer through treatment and recovery.

"It's important to understand that each patient's situation is unique. We touch a lot of patients across a lot of indications, so we need to make sure we deliver the right tools and resources," she said. "We need to look at digital therapeutics as a broad, foundational tool."

"We need to look at digital therapeutics as a broad, foundational tool"

Here are a few considerations for life science organizations seeking to optimize their digital health products for unique patient populations.

- **Bring value from the beginning.** For many patients, the time of greatest uncertainty is immediately following

diagnosis. The most valuable digital tools begin guiding patients from this point, Opdyke said. *"You get overwhelmed when you're diagnosed with cancer. It helps to know what questions you should ask in your initial conversation with your physician. That helps you feel empowered in understanding your diagnosis and treatment."*

- **Provide personalization where possible.** Different types of cancer require different levels of support, as do different stages of cancer. As a result, some patients may benefit from a digital therapeutic specifically designed for their diagnosis, while others may be better served by a product tailored to their therapy. Whatever the case, patients benefit from app features and workflows personalized to their individual treatment plan.
- **Allow support to evolve.** Along the same lines, patients' needs change throughout treatment. Prior to treatment, they will likely want educational and informational resources. During treatment, they may need to report medication side effects and other symptoms, and they may benefit from reminders to take their medication. Patients in recovery may want to connect with support groups to talk about everyday life with cancer.
- **Assess needs across geographies.** Avoid rolling out a single application worldwide. Different locations around the world may have different needs. Patients in some countries may be more likely to need financial assistance, while patients in other countries may need product features that are less dependent on access to high-speed Internet or

How Can Life Science Company Benefit from Digital Health in Oncology

cellular connections. Of course, care practices as well as requirements for patient data privacy will also vary across geographies.

- **Involve patients in design and development.** The best way to understand how patients navigate cancer diagnosis and treatment is to hear directly from them, Opdyke said. *"We need to know where patients face barriers to care, and where they need the most support at different points of time in the journey."* Getting this right requires gathering feedback from a diverse cohort of patients in the early stages of product design, through development, and after going to market, she added: *"There needs to be a true partnership to make sure we put the patient at the center."*

Look beyond traditional cancer treatment for additional ways to support patients

Digital therapeutics offer clear benefits to both patients going through cancer treatment and the healthcare providers caring for them. Opdyke pointed out that life science organizations are uniquely positioned to leverage digital therapeutics to offer several additional types of support.

- **Screening and early detection.** Promoting the use of digital health tools alongside community-based organizations helps raise awareness of the importance of cancer screenings, early detection, and early-stage treatment among patients who may not

frequently visit the traditional provider setting.

- **A shift in the site to care.** Digital tools enable remote monitoring, whether through direct connections to medical devices or through patient-reported outcomes. This makes it possible to shift care from the hospital to the home, Opdyke said – a valuable consideration if patients face difficulty getting to their appointments or if providers face capacity constraints for in-person care.
- **Communicating the pace of chance.** Life science organizations routinely obtain new approvals for existing therapies or bring brand-new products to market. The benefits of these innovations should be communicated to providers who may otherwise miss these updates as they care for patients on a day-to-day basis.
- **Advocate for increased access.** As noted, many parts of the world lack the infrastructure to provide high-speed Internet or cellular coverage. Here, life science can push for modernization to help patients in need, Opdyke said. *"We need broad access for our patient populations. We can't make this a barrier to adoption."*
- **Leverage data for continuous improvement.** Patient data management can pose challenges to life sciences. Organizations need to set standards for how to capture and use data during the development process and refine these standards as utilization expands, Opdyke said. The upside is the potential to use this data to optimize digital therapeutics tools and ultimately improve the patient experience.

Conclusion

During the webinar, the best case to be made for adopting digital health came from the patient herself. Brande Pearson, who used digital health tools throughout the treatment of basal cell cancer in her shoulder, said the best way to encourage patients to use apps is for care teams to tell patients that this is the way they are going to work together.

"Once patients start using the app, they will quickly see that it is their friend, and it makes things much easier to manage," Pearson said. *"Plus, the more you use it, the better it is for you."*

Digital health tools can encourage provider-patient communication, close gaps in medication management, and offer financial and emotional support. It's important for life science organizations to embrace the innovation of digital health tools to empower their provider partners to support the patient's journey from diagnosis through treatment. Making this possible means ensuring that applications are designed, developed, and implemented with the needs of patients front and center from the very beginning.

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 Sophie's
experience and insights on
digital health:**

Watch the webinar

