Aptar
digital health

How Can an Oncology Healthcare Provider Benefit from Digital Health?

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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.

An emerging class of digital health solutions helps 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 health offers benefits to healthcare provider, helping them manage and monitor more patients and improve their treatment outcomes. In a recent webinar entitled "*How Can Digital Health 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 life science industry.

Mario E. Lacouture, MD, Director of the Oncodermatology Program at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, discussed the benefits of digital health for patients and providers and described how health systems can increase the accessibility and availability of these apps for their patients.

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. 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

WEBINAR: How Digital Health Can Empower Cancer Patients?

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Digital Health User and Former Cancer Patient

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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.

How providers benefit from patient access to digital health

While patients clearly have a lot to gain from using digital health tools to manage their cancer treatments, providers also stand to benefit.

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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For starters, patients are more informed about their diagnosis, treatment, and recovery. "*It's critical from the very beginning to be able to understand the implications of the type of cancer that has been diagnosed, and digital health tools make their lives easier as they go through this journey,*" Dr. Lacouture said. "*When patients are more informed, they know what their treatment plan looks like, they know what symptoms or side effects to expect, and they are better able to identify whether what they are feeling is enough for them to go to the emergency room or just to contact their doctor.*"

Improved engagement leads to a second clinical benefit: Better medication adherence. Across healthcare, medication

> ## "We welcome any tool that allows patients to communicate with us more effectively"

non-adherence rates range from 40% to 50%. The challenge is magnified in oncology care due to the severe side effects that certain therapies have, along with the potential for complicated dosing schedules (especially if a therapy includes multiple medications or frequent dosing).

"*It can be hard for patients to know the names of their medications, let alone manage them,*" Dr. Lacouture said. "*Digital tools that capture photos of a patient's medication, read the prescription, and proactively provide reminders to patients to take their medication – without making patients enter the dosing information*

themselves – is a big help."

Bidirectional communication is a third benefit of putting digital health into patients' hands. Communication in healthcare is all too often fragmented, with messages coming to clinical care teams over the phone, via email, and increasingly through virtual care tools. Fragmentation can lead to delays, Dr. Lacouture said, since it can take several people to look at a physical or digital message and determine whether a patient needs immediate medical attention.

"*We welcome any tool that allows patients to communicate with us more effectively,*" he said. This communication could be patient-reported outcomes about medication side effects, questions about recovery from a biopsy, or requests for educational resources. Additionally, artificial intelligence can be applied to filter messages and assign priority levels. When care teams can respond to these messages in between clinical appointments, that means physicians can spend more time talking to patients during their appointments: "*The nice thing is, we can talk to them about what is worrying them the most. We can focus on the treatments.*"

Five tips to improve accessibility of digital health solutions

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 already struggling to provide patients with the

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personalized care that cancer patients need. This unmet need will only grow over time.

Digital health is poised to play an important role in helping to manage an increasing number of patients with cancer diagnoses – but health systems need to ensure that digital health tools are increasingly available to more of their patients. Dr. Lacouture offered some recommendations to help health systems improve the accessibility of these tools.

- **Get feedback from range of patients.** To best understand how patients will use a digital health app, the teams deploying the apps need to gather feedback from patients in many demographic groups. This will help ensure an app can support multiple languages, provide information that's culturally sensitive, meet the needs of individuals with vision impairment, and so on.

- **Don't make assumptions.** A survey of patients in the United Kingdom found that 52% of patients over 65 would use a smartphone app to manage their health – but less than 4% were offered the chance to use an app. Care teams should be ready to recommend an app to all patients and then accordingly adjust the way they communicate with patients based on how they respond.

- **Integrate everything in one place.** Patients receiving cancer treatment from multiple providers often have multiple apps to log into. That makes

it difficult to send messages to or schedule appointments with the right provider. Integrating several solutions into a single interface makes it much easier for patients to manage their care – especially if the digital health app also includes the tools they use for telehealth, remote monitoring, or other forms of virtual care.

- **Educate your teams to educate patients.** As soon as a provider has recommended an app to a patient, the care team should be ready to help them download the app, log in, and use it. Important workflows to demonstrate include sending messages to care teams, reporting symptoms and side effects, and looking up information about medications and treatments.

- **Give patients more control.** Cancer care isn't one size fits all, and the workflows in digital health apps for cancer care shouldn't be, either. Some patients will want more information than others; some patients will prefer more encouragement than others. If an app can be personalized to meet these preferences, patients are more likely to stick with it throughout their treatment. "*Give the power to the patients as to how these tools should be utilized*," Dr. Lacouture said.

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 physicians 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. As health systems look 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.

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 Dr. Lacouture's experience and insights on digital health:

Watch the webinar