The Healthcare Future for the iGeneration: Integrating the Patient and the Healthcare System

Tim Simard, CEO, Anthurium Solutions, Inc.

Introduction

The Idea Paper written by Wood, Greene, Franks, Poole, Ficzere, and Johnston (INNOVATIONS in pharmacy, 2013, Vol. 4, No. 3) raises an important issue and presents interesting points. I agree with the authors' conclusions and found their paper thought-providing. In this commentary I will elaborate further on (1) opportunities for pharmacists and (2) aspects of technology in this important domain. I will use both systems and domain architecture perspectives for this commentary.

Pharmacist

Pharmacists have a unique but limited window of opportunity during the transformation of healthcare to redefine and expand their role in patient care delivery. The pharmacist has a special position in the healthcare eco-system to make a profound effect on patients, care delivery systems, plans and stakeholders across the care continuum. Pharmacists have an opportunity to redefine their role and benefit their profession by transitioning from dispensing medications as a core practice to embracing a suite of patient care delivery services. These services could include patient adherence management, MTM, disease management, care transition, and @home care management. These services could be enabled by smartphones and tablets for pharmacists and patients to work collaboratively. Pharmacists can add even more value than they do today as a key member along with their colleagues on a patient's care management team, especially as value based delivery systems and ACOs expand and patient outcomes at lower cost with quality and safety are the goal.

Finally, there is a growing imbalance in the demand for care and supply of healthcare professionals that is another driver and opportunity for pharmacists to expand their role and fill a critical need. Demand for access to care is increasing due to the ACA when more than 30 million people who will obtain access to care and the aging boomer population is growing every day and will continue to demand more care while at the same time the supply of physicians and nurses is not keeping pace. This dynamic will put substantial pressure on the entire system to meet this increasing demand for care and decreasing supply of talent. The pharmacist profession has the opportunity to expand their role in helping both the patients and their colleagues to meet these future challenges.

Corresponding author: Timothy Simard, CEO
Anthurium Solutions; http://www.anthuriumsi.com/
Mobile: 781-249-0056; Email: tsimard@anthuriumsi.com

Technology

The authors' vision of using smartphones and tablets to integrate patients, their health data, wellness plan into the healthcare system I suggest has the greatest potential to enable *patient self-managed care through education and coordination;* and *improved collaborative care through shared communications with their professional care team and, friends and family care givers.* Many of the advantages and benefits of the technology the authors have noted are substantiated by their global and accelerated adoption. It took 38 years for the radio to reach 50 million people and it only took three years for the iPod to reach 50 million people and only two years for Facebook. Tablet sales now exceed laptop sales. There are almost as many mobile devices as people on the earth (about 6b mobile phones to 8b people) and smartphones are beginning to dominate mobile phone sales. Thus, the ubiquitous mobile phone and the growing preference of the tablet supports the authors assertion that we have an opportunity to influence patient behavior by introducing new tools into the patients care program. Perhaps, in addition to an Rx prescription the patient receives an Rx for a smart phone loaded and configured specifically for that patient with reminders for medications, appointments and tests, educational material that pops up periodically, rewards systems for becoming educated, exercise programs, games that are fun and educate, social networking and team based challenges – all personalized and protected for that patient. What's the ROI of educating a patient with diabetes and having their diary with them when them when they meet the doctor; what's the ROI if the cardiology patient doesn't miss a cardiologist examination because an appointment was rescheduled automatically?

Change

I believe the most significant challenge is the adaptability of an organization to change, the integration into a system, and managing change for people. This is especially true with large organizations and wherever there is patient data and security is a concern and risk management is a reality. The authors note some of these challenges which are often unique to the organization. Another observation is that the authors point to the tablet and smartphone specifically while the world is moving to a BOYD – *Bring Your Own Device* so change is already happening and the next innovation is around the corner. We need to build solutions that adapt to change whether from new innovations or regulations.

Conclude

I will conclude by saying that the authors have articulated an opportunity that clearly exists today for patients to improve their health independently and in partnership with their pharmacist, and for the pharmacist to redefine their role within the patient care delivery system using enabling technology.

One last point for consideration is from a systems perspective. There are over 500 million "apps" or point solutions for mobile devices on the market and the challenge to have scale and impact within the eco-system of healthcare delivery is pointed out by the authors. The challenge for organizations is well stated below by a quote from Natalie Sweeney, Senior Business Innovation Strategy Consultant at Highmark Health Services, Inc. in Pittsburgh, PA in a recent conversation we had:

"I can try a 1000 pilots (point solutions) but if we don't have an integrated company-wide platform solution that can connect all those "points" and at the same time can enable departments within our company to independently implement innovative solutions then we won't be able to move the needle - on cost, quality or access."

I suggest that solutions are best looked at within a system and domain architecture. When one finds the right entry point into that domain then that innovative solution will have positive impact and scale.