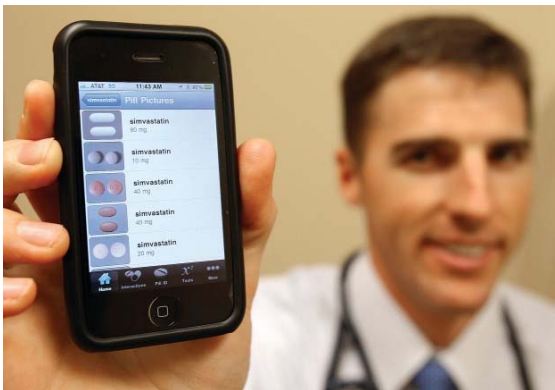


Twin Falls Times News, Saturday, Aug. 20, 2011 – by Kimberlee Kruesi (2 pages)

There's an App for that Cold

As a physician, it's not uncommon for Dr. Trevor Satterfield to meet with patients who can remember what a pill looks like, but the name escapes them. That's where his iPhone has become his best friend. While his patients play Angry Birds on their smartphones in the waiting room, Satterfield is referencing his phone as he would a medical encyclopedia.

Satterfield, a physician at St. Luke's Magic Valley Medical Center in Twin Falls, commonly uses an application called Epocrates. He inputs the pill's descriptions — color, shape and clarity — into the app. It then responds with a list of possible medication matches with images. Among him, the patient and the phone, the pill mystery is quickly solved.



Trevor Satterfield, a doctor at St. Luke's Magic Valley Medical Center, shows an app, epocrates, he frequently uses to find information about medications.

Satterfield is one of the many physicians across the nation using smartphones in their daily medical practice. According to Manhattan Research, a health care research firm, almost 82 percent of physicians use smartphones. Besides looking up medications, doctors use smartphone apps to retrieve instructional diagrams and videos for patients.

“I’ll tell my patient how often they need to get a particular cancer exam, but then look it up on my phone to double-check,” Satterfield said. “Guidelines are always changing, but my phone is always updating.”

Medical schools and residency programs are also jumping on board with the smartphone trend. Family Medicine Residency of Idaho, a nonprofit residency program, gives its residents a smartphone allowance.

The residents use the phones to look up articles, log procedures and measure medicinal dosages.

“We used to encourage residents to get PDAs, but now the evolution has moved towards iPhones and Androids,” said Holly Taniguchi, the program’s residency coordinator.

While there are more doctors and students using the technology, there is very little regulation on what is being put into the apps.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration recently released a draft guideline for smartphone apps designed to be used as medical devices. But for the majority of the apps, no one is overseeing what kinds of information companies are placing into them.

According to both Satterfield and Taniguchi, it all boils down to reputation. “We go by the best reputation,” Satterfield said. “They all have a disclaimer that they aren’t responsible for medical decisions.”

Satterfield doesn’t see the technology leaving anytime soon. He says many of his older coworkers have started asking how they, too, can use the phones. “It’s an unrealistic expectation that a doctor can keep up on everything,” he said. “I just want to be accurate and use the best information out there.”

What the Physicians are using

Epocrates: According to its website, more than 1.3 million doctors use this app. The free version includes a pill identifier, information and a medical calculator. For a price, the deluxe version brings databases and medical dictionaries.

Diagnosaurus DDX: This app is designed to help physicians weigh the probability of one disease over another. It includes more than 1,000 diagnoses and is searchable by disease, symptom or organ system.

5-Minute Clinical Consult: This app gives diagnostic and management guidance on various conditions. It also has a medical calculator and a treatment algorithm.