

POSTS MADE IN DECEMBER 2012

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Several leading trends will drive health and healthcare in 2013, but nothing on the order of mobile wireless devices, particularly wearable devices equipped with sensors, web connections, or both.

The ground work for wearable monitoring devices began a few years ago with the development of new, standardized wireless technology, the miniaturization of wireless connectivity and the recent introduction of the Bluetooth 4.0 standard. That enables these devices to run for as long as a year on a single battery rather than having to be replaced every couple of weeks.

Dominating the market are the numerous glucose monitors, fitness and heart-rate monitors. Here are additional examples of products that will be introduced over the next 12 months that enable patients to be in charge of monitoring their care with a simple device that they carry in their pocket, or wear on their body, 24/7.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has recently approved an iPhone case that can monitor a patient's pulse and heart rhythm. This \$199 device, commonly known as the *iPhone ECG*, works with either an iPhone 4 or 4S. It will be available to health professionals in the U.S. in January.

To use the device, patients place two fingers on the back of iPhone case and rest them on the large electrodes. The case can also be pressed directly against a patient's chest for ECG, (electrocardiogram) monitoring, purposes. Data from the electrodes wirelessly pass from the case to the iPhone, where it is analyzed or sent to the cloud for

storage. The iPhone case runs on its own coin-cell battery, which lasts for approximately 12,000 scans and 30 seconds in length.

www.alivecor.com

The FDA has also approved a blood pressure monitor that measures the systolic and diastolic blood pressure and pulse rate of an adult individual, at home, by using a non-invasive technique in which an inflatable cuff is wrapped around the upper arm of the individual and connected to a smartphone, which transmits the readings to a physician or nurse. This device requires three AAA batteries and is compatible with the iPhone, iPad, and iPod Touch. The BP readings are logged and time-stamped for record-keeping purposes. The readouts can be emailed to a physician or synced to a patient's personal health record that is stored in Microsoft Health Vault.

Another smartphone, developed on the Android platform by a Swiss company, includes several medical sensors that power seven health tests, combined with wellness-related applications and cloud-based services. The health tests are operated by placing a finger on one of the sensors, allowing users to measure, track and analyze their medical measurements, take corrective action, plan meals, activities and more. The tests include one-lead ECG, body temperature, blood glucose, heart rate, blood oxygen saturation, body fat percentage and stress levels as expressed by heart rate variability. Each medical test is presented as an application and, in addition, there are diet applications and programmable reminders for medications. All collected data is automatically and securely saved to a remote server and can be retrieved from the cloud for follow-up anytime, anywhere. Results and historical data can be shared with doctors, family or others on the user's request through e-mail or text message.

<http://mhealthwatch.com/mhealth-iphones-to-provide-mobile-means-for-monitoring-blood-pressure-16425/>

Several new pill boxes with alarms, timers, and monitors will also become available in 2013. They insure that elderly patients take the right pill at the right time in the right dose. There are new wireless phones under development with back lit screens and easy to read numbers that enable elderly home-bound individuals to call their caretaker, call 911, or to connect with a provider with the touch of the one button.

Continuity of Care and Care Coordination, A Common Thread

Throughout 2013, we will see the increased adoption of EHRs, health information exchange and cloud computing for aggregating and analyzing health data, as the provider world moves toward meeting Meaningful Use Stage II deadlines. Care coordination and continuity of care will be recurring themes as hospitals strive to fulfill the goals of accountable care organizations. 2013 will also see more and more patients become engaged with their care, and team with their providers to figure out the best possible treatment route for their individual situations.

Robots to Flourish in 2013

Healthcare robots will also be more universally deployed including: robotics surgery, intelligent prosthetics, robotic motor coordination analysis and therapy. Also under development are robot-assisted mental, cognitive and social therapy devices, as well as robots who will assist home-bound individuals with menial tasks and health monitoring. Robots are good at precision, durability and repeatability and can facilitate minimally invasive surgery and remote tele-surgery, bringing efficiency and safety to procedures that heretofore were difficult and fraught with risk.

<http://www.nih.gov/news/health/sep2012/nibib-18.htm>

As we head into the New Year, these exciting technologies will help to empower and engage patients and provide them with a better, safer health care experience.

[TAKING STOCK, HOW TO MANAGE YOUR RISING HEALTH CARE COSTS](#)

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As we approach the end of 2012, it is a time to take stock, regarding your finances. This has been a year when the economic climate has been far from upbeat; a year when U.S., spending on health has continued to accelerate as health insurance premiums, higher co-payments and rising deductibles as well as the rising prices for medical treatment continue to dominate the family budget.

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation's most recent report on employer-provided insurance, the average family's premium climbed 4.5 percent this year. That's more than twice the inflation rate and comes on top of a 9.5 percent increase last year. For those who work for small businesses, the news is even worse. Family premiums increased more than \$1,100 this year, an 8 percent increase. It would appear that Obamacare is going to put more of a burden on the average worker's pocketbook with higher deductibles necessitated by the various mandates that require funding.

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/sallypipes/2012/10/01/another-broken-obama-promise-the-healthcare-cost-monster-emerges/>

There are those who contend that if consumers are paying more for their care they will begin to pay closer attention to their health. Others feel that the way to resolve the high cost and eliminate some of the waste in the health care system is to change the way providers are compensated, from fee for service to a system of block payments. They feel that this would put the onus on providers and patients to work as a team to cut their costs and improve the patient's health.

There is also a group who argue that for health costs to come down, there must be transparency in health care pricing. This concept is based on the premise that if consumers understand the prices for health services they will shop for the best deals, comparing quality, price and desired outcome.

While all of these initiatives could have a positive impact, we are still living with the reality that health care is the largest line item in a family's budget these days. There are ways for individuals to potentially save money. The following are suggestions that just might work for you.

1. Understand the specifics of the Affordable Care Act. Enacted in 2009, this bill includes a provision that requires insurers to spend 80% of the premiums they collect from you on health care costs. If they do not meet that threshold, the insurer has to send the customer a rebate.
2. Check to see if your plan covers preventive care without co-payments or deductibles such as mammograms, well baby visits, breast-feeding support, immunizations, etc.
3. Do your homework and find a plan that offers better, cheaper terms by reading the summary of plan benefits and coverage elements in various situations.
4. Shop for cheaper drugs. Check every drug you are prescribed for a generic, which will be cheaper.
5. Be smart about high deductible plans that enable you to save money on premiums and take the risk that you will not need extensive health services, particularly if you keep up with wellness programs and preventive care.
6. Stay within the network of your health insurer. Going out of network is going to cost a lot more money and is not always advisable.

7. Always question the necessity for a test or a procedure. Don't put off what is really necessary, however, challenge your providers to give you sound reasons when they suggest that you need one of the big-ticket tests such as scans and MRIs.

8. Study all of your medical statements and bills and challenge your insurer if they refuse to pay for a specific treatment or procedure. These decisions do get overturned.

More information on rebates, preventive care deductibles, coverage for tests and procedures and other issues related to health costs can be found at:

<https://www.healthcare.gov/>

As an engaged and empowered patient there are also specific actions that you can personally take to help lower your health care costs including:

1. Take care of yourself. Engage in preventive care and wellness programs.
2. Look at some of your lifestyle habits and think twice about overeating, smoking, excessive use of alcohol or drugs.
3. Set up a flexible spending account which allows you to use pretax money for medical costs not covered by your insurer.
4. Take advantage of free gym memberships and discounted weight management or nutrition classes offered by your health plan
5. Build a long and trusting relationship with a provider who will serve as your gatekeeper and find the best choices for keeping you well and healthy.

Finally, have a healthy New Year!

