

Health-care practitioners' stories can aid medical device designers

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Health care laws to protect patients' privacy make it nearly impossible for medical device designers to develop and test the safety and usability of medical products by observing use in an actual practitioner-patient setting. As a result, usability errors and hazards may be overlooked, with the potential for devastating consequences. In the recent issue of *Ergonomics in Design*, human factors/ergonomics researchers found that storytelling as a qualitative research method was a more effective—and stimulating—way for health care practitioners to provide valuable insights during the information-gathering and product development phases.

Storytelling, unlike the more formal interview methods, allows more conversational freedom. Storytellers can provide more detailed information about their personal experiences with a product and recall the unique circumstances associated with each experience. To test this theory, Kim Gausepohl, Woodrow Winchester, James Arthur, and Tonya Smith-Jackson held storytelling and interview sessions with health care practitioners to discuss [medical device](#) errors. They found that participants in the storytelling sessions were much more willing to openly discuss HF/E problems that they encountered than were interview session participants.

"Several storytelling participants stayed after the session to chat, and one even followed us to our car to continue chatting," said Gausepohl. "In contrast, no interview participants initiated any after-session chats, and they all appeared to be exhausted at the end, even though they spent the

same amount of time in the session as did storytelling participants."

Storytelling as a means to design and develop medical devices has yet to be explored more fully, but Gausepohl and colleagues believe that practitioners' stories could provide useful scenarios to test the usability and safety of products in the absence of observations of product use in real-world settings.

Provided by Human Factors and Ergonomics Society

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