

Report identifies game changers for US health care

September 23 2014, by Karen Pallarito, Healthday Reporter



Recent innovations, developments may transform direction of patient care in next decade, researchers say.

(HealthDay)—Imagine if doctors and hospitals got paid for providing *better* care, not *more* care, and consumers had better data for making informed health choices.

A new report suggests that's the direction the U.S. [health](#) system is headed.

The report, from the IMS Institute for Healthcare Informatics in Parsippany, N.J., identifies 10 "harbingers of change"—recent events expected to alter the delivery of [health care](#) and use of medicines over the next decade.

The authors concede that poor adoption of new technologies, worries about data privacy and other obstacles could slow the pace of change,

but their long-term outlook for [patient care](#) is hopeful.

"I think there can be optimism about the effectiveness of the care [patients] receive and even the cost of it," said Murray Aitken, executive director of the institute, as well as one of the study's authors.

One indication of what lies ahead: the entry of such technology juggernauts as Apple, Google and Samsung into the health care marketplace, according to the report.

IMS predicts greater innovation in mobile health applications and wearable health devices that cull [personal health data](#) and monitor everything from physical activity to blood-sugar levels.

"These new technologies get people more engaged in their own health care," Aitken said.

And with a consumer's permission, a doctor could tap into that data to tweak medication levels without the patient having to make an appointment.

Based on results of a recent European study, IMS estimates that mobile health technology could benefit a third of the U.S. population and save the health system \$81 billion by encouraging wellness and ensuring appropriate treatment.

Paul Hughes-Cromwick, senior health economist at the Altarum Institute's Center for Sustainable Health Spending, in Ann Arbor, Mich., doubts whether mobile technologies, like the newly announced Apple Watch, will make much of a dent in U.S. [health care costs](#), though.

"It will always be hard to get people to do what's right to take care of themselves, and just having a watch, by itself, isn't going to do much," he

said.

But, Cyndy Nayer, founder and CEO of the Center of Health Engagement in Naples, Fla., sees enormous potential in the new health apps and devices coming on the market.

In five years, the amount of self-management activity that people use on mobile technology will be counted as dollars earned toward reducing their insurance premiums, she predicted.

Another harbinger of change is the growth of so-called "accountable care organizations" (ACO) that bring hospitals, doctors and other providers together to coordinate patient care. In an ACO and similar hospital-physician partnerships, health-care providers are held accountable for patient outcomes, and the focus of care is on value, not volume.

Improved care coordination through payment and delivery reform could help reduce more than \$200 billion annually in avoidable health care costs, the IMS reports.

IMS also views the federal government's release of Medicare physician data earlier this year as an important step toward greater health data transparency.

For providers, the real benefit of having detailed clinical data is "really understanding what works best for each patient," Aitken explained.

Consumers are demanding data, too, Nayer said. People enrolled in high-deductible health plans, in particular, are becoming savvy health care shoppers.

"Within the year, we're going to see this huge movement of consumers asking the questions: How much does it cost? What are the quality

indicators? And, what are the outcomes I can expect?" Nayer said.

Other key indicators of health system change cited by the report include:

- The discovery of highly effective treatments for hepatitis C, like Gilead Sciences' medication Sovaldi. The current cost for a 12-week treatment of Sovaldi is \$84,000, according to the report. As cures for other deadly diseases come down the pipeline, the [health system](#) must shift the way it pays for the upfront costs of medicines, IMS said.
- A new online tool and mobile app to help cancer doctors weigh the cost of medicines, along with their benefits and side effects. IMS believes the initiative signals that cost will become a factor in doctors' clinical decisions.

"To me, it's pretty clear doctors have zero interest in knowing the cost of things because their job is to provide the best care for patients," said Hughes-Cromwick. He said patients in high-deductible plans will be the ones pressuring doctors to tell them the costs of different treatments.

More information: Consumer Reports' Best Buy Drugs is a free source of information on [the safety, effectiveness and price of drugs](#).

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