

GW physician helps launch HerStory app for women experiencing breast cancer, mastectomy

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As physicians spend less time with their patients, often as little as 10-15 minutes per appointment, they grow increasingly wary of the limited emotional support they can provide within that time frame.

George Washington University (GW) physician Neal Sikka, M.D. talked to physicians from every specialty, from across the country, and found physicians are looking for ways to give their [patients](#) more emotional support, outside the time constraints of a doctor's office.

"I didn't realize this concern was so pervasive," said Sikka, director of the Innovative Practice Section at the GW Medical Faculty Associates and associate professor of emergency medicine at the GW School of Medicine and Health Sciences. "I spoke with internists, breast cancer specialists, radiologists, surgeons, oncologists... all of them said providing this underlying [emotional support](#) is a real concern. And this story was replicated around the country."

This was the impetus for creating [HerStory](#), a new [app](#) launched by 22Otters, which provides a platform for women affected by [breast cancer](#) and mastectomy to share their voices with other patients. Using the app, women record supportive personal stories, [health](#) advice, and practical tips.

"In our research, we found a number of studies showing patient stories

can be therapeutic for other patients," said Sikka. "We also found that while there are lots of exercise or diet apps oriented toward healthier patients, there are fewer apps available for patients with disease. We are looking for ways to use technology to help these patients in a real way."

As chief medical officer at 22Otters, Sikka is part of a team that reviews each story before it's available on the app. Audio recordings give the listener the ability to connect, but the recorder maintains a level of anonymity not found in a Facebook post or video. If women are uncomfortable sharing their voice, their story can be re-recorded using a voiceover. He hopes this platform will be expanded to support patients affected by other women's [health issues](#), as well as men's health issues.

"The number one reason a patient will download a health app is if it is doctor recommended," said Sikka. "Downloading an app like HerStory is easy and can provide important and much needed emotional relief for patients. Working with doctors on the creation of this app provides insight into health care gaps and how technology can help fill them."

Sikka is a practicing emergency physician, who also conducts research and teaches on the topics of telemedicine and mobile health at GW. At 22otters, he is offering guidance on apps intended to help patients prepare for complicated procedures, such as colonoscopies, and manage care at home after discharge. With HerStory, Sikka will continue to find innovative ways for patients to receive the support they need.

Provided by George Washington University

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