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Physician Trust and Patient Adherence: Is There an App for That?

FROM THE EDITOR: DANIEL R. VERDON

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Even though the top New Year's resolutions are about health and money, the United States faces an escalating obesity epidemic and post-recession highs for credit-card debt. The situation poses serious health risks for patients and financial challenges to a healthcare system undergoing major reform.

This month, health club use will likely burst at the seams, kicking off an annual race for more than 50 million Americans to achieve a healthier lifestyle at a cost of tens of billions of dollars in member dues alone.

Unfortunately, these promises and the motivation to change are often short-lived. In fact, statistics cited by the *Journal of Clinical Psychology* indicate [the success rate for the 45 percent of Americans who decide to make a resolution](#) in the first place is about 8 percent. While losing weight, staying fit, and kicking the smoking habit rank in the top 10 every year on most published lists, what does this adherence rate tell you about the heavy lifting healthcare teams face in changing patient behavior in 2015?

Although it makes sense for healthcare teams to encourage healthy living or even plan preventive campaigns while consumers are receptive in January, a sustained effort to promote patient adherence to physician recommendations also will have a significant impact on healthcare costs, payments under new value models, readmission rates, and health outcomes.

The underlying issue is about changing patient behavior to improve outcomes—and healthcare systems, physicians, and care delivery teams are now, more than ever, vested partners with patients.



The literature devoted to patient adherence is voluminous, but one recent study from an unlikely source caught my eye: “[Understanding Patients’ Compliance Behavior in a Mobile Healthcare System: The Role of Trust and Planned Behavior](#),” presented by Paul Benjamin Lowry, Dongsong Zhang, and Dezhi Wu at the 2014 International Conference on Information Systems in Auckland, New Zealand, on Dec. 13. This study investigates how mobile apps, when juxtaposed to patient trust, can improve patient compliance.

The study concludes that nine of its core hypotheses are supported. I found three germane to this discussion for healthcare finance leaders, physicians, and other providers interested in influencing positive behavior change to improve health:

- An increase in patients’ trust in their physicians is associated with an increase in their positive attitudes toward treatment compliance.
- An increase in patients’ general satisfaction with their physicians is associated with an increase in their trust of their doctors.
- An increase in patients’ use of a mobile patient education application designed to increase patients’ knowledge about a particular medical treatment
- will increase their trust in their physicians.

So what’s the New Year’s message? Physicians can dramatically influence patient behavior, and health care should leverage new tools to help motivate, inspire, and, ultimately help patients make better choices for a healthier life. Let’s toast to that!

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