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Health Commissioner Column

MOBILE HEALTH KEY COMPONENT
IN HEALTH CARE TECHNOLOGY REVOLUTION

HAMILTON COUNTY, OHIO – Recent innovation in healthcare has resulted in the use of technology in healthcare applications, ranging from actual physician care to maintenance of health records. A rapidly-advancing component of healthcare technology includes the world of mobile health – that is, technology that makes use of mobile devices, including the ubiquitous cellular phone to assist in managing health and information.

At a recent summit on mobile health technology, presenters shared current and future thinking on wide-ranging applications using technology already available today to assist in the diagnosis and management of disease. For instance, a cardiologist at the convention demonstrated a mobile device able to perform an echocardiogram and ultrasounds. There were demonstrations of contact lenses that monitored glaucoma symptoms; photographic applications that track changes in skin conditions and test strips able to analyze and transmit data from droplets of saliva.

Those who watched the Super Bowl a few of weeks ago may not have realized that while they were tuned into the most watched television event in US history, mobile health technology was front-and-center. New England running back BenJarvis Green-Ellis was outfitted with a special chinstrap that detected, recorded and transmitted information on how hard he was hit throughout the game to gain insight into concussions. Similar technology is already in use in youth sports with an iPhone app that helps check kids for concussions and other head injuries.

Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius said at the same conference that mobile applications can bridge the information gap between doctors and patients and help patients take better charge of their health. "We're talking about taking the biggest technology breakthrough of all time (mobile technology) and using it to address our greatest national challenge (healthcare)," she told the audience.

A PEW Research report released late last year indicated that 17 percent of mobile phone users used their devices to look up medical and health information. A Juniper survey estimated that 44 million health applications were downloaded in 2011.

We are most fortunate here in Hamilton County to have been selected to pilot a mobile application to help with a significant local and national health issue – Type 2 diabetes. Called txt4health, the program is launching in three pilot communities – Cincinnati, Detroit and New Orleans.

To use this free program (standard messaging charges may apply; consult your wireless carrier for details), people enroll by simply texting the word, "HEALTH" to 300400 using their cell phones. During the enrollment process, participants are asked a brief series of questions that assess their risk for Type 2 diabetes. Based on their responses, individuals receive text messages for 14 weeks with customized information to help them assess their type 2 diabetes risk level, set individualized goals for increased activity and weight loss and connect with local health care providers and the existing wellness and diabetes prevention resources available in our community.

 In Hamilton County, the program is being coordinated by the Greater Cincinnati Beacon Collaboration and Hamilton County Public Health. Nationally, txt4health has been developed through a unique collaboration between the American Diabetes Association (ADA), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) Beacon Community Program and Voxiva.

Why the focus Type 2 diabetes, you might ask. Nearly 74,000 people in the Greater Cincinnati area have it. Nearly 30 percent of us are obese, which is a major risk factor for diabetes and other diseases.

The txt4health program makes use of technology that research indicates 83 percent of us use – the mobile phone. The same research tells us that more than 70 percent of us use our phones to send and receive text messages.

We encourage everyone to sign up for txt4health. While the focus is on diabetes, there are messages for everyone dealing with healthy eating and exercise. The program will provide you some insight on the direction healthcare is heading in this country. Through the cooperation of our program partners, you will also have access to health tips and referral to activities throughout the region.

It would be wonderful to show Washington how Cincinnati lives up to its reputation as a leader in social media use and application by enrolling 25,000 area residents in txt4heatlh.

However, please don't enroll while driving. That's an entirely different health concern!

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Tim Ingram is the Health Commissioner for Hamilton County. Hamilton County Public Health works to assure the 450,000 citizens living outside the cities of Cincinnati, Norwood, Sharonville and Springdale are safe from disease, injury and contamination.

NEWS