



# Doctors want mobile tech that works the way they do

By Chris Hayhurst | November 8, 2018

A physician on the sidelines of his son's soccer practice checks his schedule for the following day and places an order for a prescription. Another doctor reviews a patient's labs in the hospital elevator on her way to begin her rounds. And a third clinician, realizing she has a parent-teacher conference in the morning, pulls out her iPad after dinner for an hour of documentation work – and some peace of mind.

Welcome to mobile-tech healthcare circa 2018, where laptops, tablets, and most of all, smartphones, are becoming an essential component of the clinical workflow. Nearly half of all healthcare professionals, according to one recent report, cite “the ability to work from any location at any time” as critical to their productivity in and out of the office.

Physicians now use an average of four different work-related mobile applications, and among healthcare professionals working in hospitals,

more than 60 percent use personal devices on the job – even when their organization has a policy against doing so.

A 2018 survey by the online magazine Physicians Practice shows similar mobile-tech usage among those in primary care: 76 percent of the physician respondents polled say they rely on mobile tech in their practices at least once a week.

“Consumer adoption of mobile technology is driving its use in healthcare as well,” says connected-health IT analyst Lynne Dunbrack, research vice president for IDC Health Insights.

“When you look at smartphone use just in the general population, we're up to around 80 or 90 percent adoption now,” Dunbrack says. “Healthcare professionals are very used to having these devices for personal use, relying on them every day at home. To them it's like, ‘Why not? Why shouldn't I be able to use this thing to work?’”

## Current tech doesn't live up to the hype

The problem, many in healthcare say, is that despite the definite and growing demand, mobile innovations for clinical professionals are lagging behind those available to patients.

A 2018 athenahealth clinical provider survey, for example, found that providers perceive existing mobile offerings to be “slow,” “distracting,” and “hard to read and navigate.” What they really want, according to the survey, are smartphone and tablet technologies that give them easy, instant access to information – tech they can use remotely and in the office to get results “at the touch of a button.”

The market for physician-facing mobile is getting bigger, with 90 percent of healthcare systems reporting they're “making significant enterprisewide investments” in such technologies “to drive clinical transformation” in their organizations.

Yet many physicians, when they consider what's available now, are left with the feeling that things could be better.

“This is really about the inherent mobile nature of clinicians,” says Dunbrack. “This isn't a workforce that sits at its desk. They're going from patient to patient, moving around all the time. They want technologies that will help them to be more efficient and help them provide better care.”

## Relieve stress, increase productivity

The new measurement efforts free up Highland One physician who can attest to that fact is Sally Ginsburg, M.D., a board-certified pediatrician with Pioneer Valley Pediatrics in Longmeadow, Massachusetts. “I know some clinicians who don't use mobile apps because they don't like doing work when they're not at the office,” Ginsburg says. “But I

see it differently. To me, we're in this job 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Our work is always with us and is part of our lives.”

In her case, Ginsburg says, she likes to use her smartphone “to make relatively not-useful time more useful.” If she's a passenger in a car, or finishing breakfast before work, she'll connect to her clinic's EHR or log in to the patient portal to get a head start on her busy day.

“It's a way for me to free up my mind and alleviate stress,” Ginsburg says. “If I can answer all the questions and deal with problems before they build up, I know I won't have that work when I walk in the door – I've already handled it and moved it out of the way.”

Staying connected to her practice with mobile tech also gives her more control over urgent patient matters, Ginsburg notes. “If I get a message from a patient, I can answer it right away. It's better for them and it takes the pressure off of me.”

Ginsburg says she's looking forward to the day the technology allows her to access all the information she needs in one place. Ideally, she says, it would include a user interface that “is really smooth, with everything in the same format.”

She's struggled with mobile tech in the past that presented data multiple ways within the system. “That just makes it harder see and to access, and for me that means I'm much less likely to use it.”

One physician who can attest to that fact is Sally Ginsburg, M.D., a board-certified pediatrician with Pioneer Valley Pediatrics in Longmeadow, Massachusetts. “I know some clinicians who don't use mobile apps because they don't like doing work when they're not at the office,” Ginsburg says. “But I see it differently. To me, we're in this job 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Our work is always with us and is part of our lives.”

In her case, Ginsburg says, she likes to use her smartphone “to make relatively not-useful time more useful.” If she's a passenger in a car, or

finishing breakfast before work, she'll connect to her clinic's EHR or log in to the patient portal to get a head start on her busy day.

"It's a way for me to free up my mind and alleviate stress," Ginsburg says. "If I can answer all the questions and deal with problems before they build up, I know I won't have that work when I walk in the door – I've already handled it and moved it out of the way."

Staying connected to her practice with mobile tech also gives her more control over urgent patient matters, Ginsburg notes. "If I get a message from a patient, I can answer it right away. It's better for them and it takes the pressure off of me."

Ginsburg says she's looking forward to the day the technology allows her to access all the information she needs in one place. Ideally, she says, it would include a user interface that "is really smooth, with everything in the same format."

She's struggled with mobile tech in the past that presented data multiple ways within the system. "That just makes it harder see and to access, and for me that means I'm much less likely to use it."

## Mobile tech in development

Health-technology companies are listening to this kind of physician feedback, analysts say.

For example, they're developing mobile solutions that employ artificial intelligence to automatically present relevant data to clinicians in the moment of care.

They're also creating mobile tech that is interoperable and EHR-agnostic, so that providers can access patient information no matter where they were last treated; and they're incorporating new image-sharing technologies that let clinicians see medical imaging studies live and in 3D.

And finally, because effective healthcare depends on effective collaboration, some vendors are

developing videoconferencing and image-notation tools that allow physicians to work with their peers in real time.

Their end goal is to give providers a clear view of the entire patient-healthcare landscape – inpatient, outpatient, and even from patients' homes – through a single, and mobile, pane of glass.

For her part, Ginsburg says, she doesn't tend to worry about the details around what a mobile health solution can or cannot do.

The app she currently uses lets her dictate her notes into the EHR from anywhere, "and it picks up everything I say pretty much perfectly," she says.

It's features like that – simple and practical – that she most appreciates about the technology and which drive her to use her smartphone to work in and out of the office. "Because it helps with our workflow, it gives me more time to spend with patients," she says. "That's really what makes it most valuable to me."

---

*Chris Hayhurst is a writer based in Northampton, Massachusetts.*

### athena**insight**

A daily news hub reporting from the heart of the healthcare internet, with access to a comprehensive data set of healthcare transactions from athenahealth's nationwide network. We equip leaders with actionable insight and inspiration for making health care work as it should.

---

### Stay in the know

Sign up for weekly data and news:  
[insight.athenahealth.com/newsletter](https://insight.athenahealth.com/newsletter)