

Key to digital health success: Digging into what doctors want

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“Know your users and start testing right away.” That’s key advice one physician entrepreneur gives others going down the same path, and he said the AMA Physician Innovation Network (PIN) has played a crucial role in finding practices willing to test his product and provide useful feedback.

“It’s been a pretty powerful tool for us,” said internist Joshua Reischer, MD, CEO and founder of Health Note, a platform that creates a physician note using information provided by patients before their visit.

Health Note sends patients a text message a few days before their scheduled doctor’s appointment. Patients click on a link opening a “chatbot” that asks them a series of questions regarding their conditions. The bot can even collect information from the patients’ ID and insurance card. Then all of this gets organized into a note physicians review prior to the visit.

“It’s enabling patients to take part in their own record,” Dr. Reischer said. “We’re live in 10 sites around the country.”

To find physicians and others to help him pilot the platform, Dr. Reischer turned to the Physician Innovation Network.

“The way I see it, if a physician is on the PIN website, they’re interested in innovation and you’ve already filtered and found people who are likely like-minded and interested in improving health care through better experience and using better tools,” he said. “I can’t really think of another place to go to find these types of people in such an easy format.”

PIN is an online community that helps connect health tech companies, entrepreneurs and physicians. Through the PIN platform, the voice, experience and needs of physicians can be heard and incorporated into new products as they are designed and developed.

Usability trumps cool factor

Integrating the physician perspective into the development of digital health tools is “vitally important,” Dr. Reischer said.

“There are many companies that are created by nonproviders and they have cool tools, but when it comes to clinical relevance, they struggle to create something that’s actually usable on a day-to-day basis,” he explained. “Integrating within an office and not disrupting the workflow is vitally important and so, if you don’t fully understand that workflow, it’s hard to create a product that’s going to help it.”

Dr. Reischer said he has found the PIN community discussions informative, but what has been most valuable is connecting with participants after the formal program is over.

“The reaching out to physicians around the country, that’s been very useful,” he said, noting how one PIN-generated conversation led to piloting Health Note in a Dallas physician’s office.

Another PIN contact, a physician in New Jersey, was also trying to solve the documentation problem. He and Dr. Reischer connected through PIN and now the physician is working to implement Health Note in his office.

“We became friends and colleagues and that whole relationship really just started from the website,” Dr. Reischer said.

Technophobia misconception persists

A 2013 medical school graduate, Dr. Reischer was happily surprised to find a wide mix of generations active on PIN. He said it speaks against the misconception that physicians—especially older physicians—are technophobic. He thinks that previous false starts by startups trying to perform electronic health record integrations has caused some to be cautious about being an early adopter.

“If something works, and can help provide better care, doctors are often the first to jump on it,” he said.

The AMA is committed to making technology an asset rather than a burden for physicians, and Dr. Reischer sees a bright future for digital health.

He sees technology automating burdensome administrative and documentation tasks, assisting diagnosis, bettering communication, and “making physicians’ lives better and enabling them to provide better care.”