

How New Apps and Technology Create a New Central Nervous System for MS Patients: A Look at the Current State of Online Disease Management

Vanessa Merta, Science Blogger | September 22, 2014

With over two million people suffering from multiple sclerosis and a cure for the debilitating autoimmune disease remaining illusive, patients are using new technologies to improve how they manage the disease. By leveraging web-based technologies and smart phones, patients have new weapons to improve their symptom management by collaborating with other patients and access care more easily.

Websites such as www.PatientsLikeMe.com play a supportive role by helping patients understand and manage their disease, and track potential outcomes. Patients use the website to connect with other patients to track symptoms, relapses, and medication results. By entering these data, patients not only learn more about managing their illness, they also help scientists and doctors use the data for research.



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In a [recent TedxTalk](#), PatientsLikeMe President, Ben Heywood, spoke of the growing MS community, currently at over 25,000 active users on the site. “You can see what it’s like to have MS,” said Mr. Heywood. “Symptoms in real-time of thousands and thousands of patients [are captured],” analyzed for trends, and help inform researchers in ways that may expedite a cure.

These widespread patient histories may prove to be helpful to drug developers because they can see what symptoms are not well managed, in the hopes of creating a goal for a future drug. With the knowledge of medication success rates, researchers can see if any drugs have the potential to be improved, or if they should be forgotten all together. Before websites like PatientsLikeMe.com, obtaining this kind of information was nearly impossible.

Want to help those suffering with MS? Consider donating to the HealthWell Foundation, and note that you wish for your donation to go to the MS Fund. Click [here](#) to learn how to donate to patients in need.

When patients are on the go and don't have access to a computer, smart phone applications offer welcome help. Patients have their entire health history with them at all times with apps such as the MS Association of America's [Multiple Sclerosis Self-Care Manager](#). Patients track mood and symptoms in a journal, and record whether or not they've taken their medications on schedule. In emergency situations, MS Self-Care Manager helps find physicians or hospitals with a Google-Map powered locator. The app makes doctor's appointments more productive due to immediate access to lab results, and a record of all symptoms since the patient's last visit.

Medical technology is trying to lessen the burden that an MS diagnosis may bring. Resources for patients are continuing to improve with the development of smart phone apps and online sites where patients can collaborate.

Technology has created its own version of a central nervous system by building a patient community with dynamic connectivity. Helping patients to manage symptoms by improving hand-held technology has become a reality for tens of thousands of MS patients. Until we have a cure or advances in medicine, these simple programs offer real benefits.

Tell us what you think about symptom tracking and online disease management. Have you put any of these products to good use?

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