

Health 2.0: Live Doctor Chats and Celebrity Drug Cocktails

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Earlier this week, I was in San Diego, attending the Health 2.0 conference. The conference featured numerous companies showcasing their innovative digital health tools. Many were startups launching in recent months such as PharmaSURVEYOR, helping patients survey the risks of their drug combinations and identifying options that may be better for the patient. The tool demonstrated how both Heath Ledger's and Anna Nicole Smith's drug regimens, although interaction free, contributed to their deaths as victims of compound risks.

Representatives from Google Health and Microsoft's HealthVault were in attendance to discuss their unique developments around personal health record (PHR) systems. In fact, much of the conference buzz surrounded the possibility of PHRs, shadowing the issue of privacy even after the World Privacy Forum recently released warnings about online PHRs. The organization recommended maintaining records off-line, warning that online PHRs, once placed online, are not covered by HIPAA and can be subpoenaed, sold, and insurance companies may use them when looking for policies to cancel. Instead, exhibitors such as PHR providers, CareData, and mediKEEPER, focused on the benefits of online PHRs such as greater patient access to health information and an ongoing connection between patient and physician.

The common theme amongst attendees was providing patients with access to digital tools to navigate the healthcare system and manage their diseases. Disease management site, ReliefInsite, demonstrated how patients can track their condition along with their providers, promoting earlier interventions and shortening time to address problems that may arise. OrganizedWisdom, a physician guided health search service, previewed LiveWisdom, a live chat service allowing site users to connect directly with physicians and other health professionals. Unique technologies such as Myca illustrated how improved communication can improve the doctor-patient relationship. Myca's goal is to provide patients with access to care the way they want, from real-time, online video chats to email, instant messaging, and face-to-face office visits. Attendee Alzinfo, an Alzheimer's families community, focused on the positives of social networking such as validation, knowledge and community.

It will certainly take time to bring the healthcare system into the technology age. I think HealthVault's, Bill Reid, may have said it best, "I think we're years away". But the tools featured at the conference further convinced me that we are headed in the right direction. The tools were useful and innovative and I'm all for their promise of helping people play a bigger role in taking care of their health.