

Fitbit, the recently FDA-cleared Apple Watch, healthcare apps, virtual visits, at-home health devices, and more are rapidly emerging and providing options for both patients and providers to experience the practice of health care in new ways.

The evidence is all around us. Check out the wrists of those around you, and inevitably you're bound to see many sporting rubber armbands and increasingly stylish-looking watches that are far more than what they appear. Not just jewelry, these devices are becoming increasingly powerful and popular. [Fitbit, founded in 2007](#), was an early entrant in the wearable or do-it-yourself (DIY) healthcare space. It's just one example of a device that captures consumer data outside the traditional healthcare setting.

[As a HealthTech article says](#): "...the health system at large has begun to view Fitbits not just as a handy gadget for consumers, but as a clinical device that can help to collect valuable and robust data for providers and care teams."

While arguably one of the industry's biggest and most widely known players, Fitbit is hardly alone in the DIY healthcare device space. Others have recognized and are leveraging the potential to use technology outside of traditional healthcare settings to capture patient data and to use that data to improve both clinical and financial outcomes across the care continuum. Health plans, for instance, are promoting the use of these devices to drive self-care management while increasing member satisfaction. These moves are prompting both adoption, and some hesitation for providers, patients and consumers alike.

Consumers Taking Control

Traditional healthcare providers are no longer uniquely responsible for storing patient care information. More and more patients are stepping forward to not only store, but to gather, that data on their own.

Patients are becoming increasingly interested in DIY healthcare options, says Fiona Gilbert, CEO [Fiona Gilbert, Inc.](#), in the San Francisco Bay area and an American College of Sports Medicine Health and Fitness Specialist. "Self-care and medical empowerment are not just buzzwords, but action," she says. And this is true across all age groups.

As technology is providing consumers with more options for self-management, the trend is only like to grow, Gilbert says. "I really believe that biohacking and personalized medicine will be mainstream. If you can customize how you like your pizza or hamburger, you definitely need to be in control of how you manage your health," she says.

The Industry Responds

The increasing popularity of DIY healthcare tech is prompting industry response on a wide range of fronts. In addition to FDA's approval of the Apple Watch as a Class II device, [CMS' Blue Button 2.0 initiative](#) now offers four years of Medicare Part A, B and D data on 53 million beneficiaries that can be accessed by providers through an API.



Healthcare providers are no longer in a position of deciding whether or not to counsel patients about the use of various forms of DIY devices. They will recognize the need for interoperability across a variety of devices both proprietary to the healthcare industry and personal.

From the provider side, patient portals have been one attempt to connect with consumers to give them access to their clinic and hospital data—and the opportunity to add to and append that data with information they're collecting themselves. Adoption has been sporadic, however, from both the patient and provider perspective as recently [covered by Medical Economics](#). Patients least likely to adopt personal portals are those in rural or high-poverty areas and those over 65. Physicians are also exhibiting hesitancy to jump full bore into the fray, fearing impacts on practice patterns and processes.

Still, demand is only likely to grow both as new technologies emerge and as the Millennial generation comes to represent a larger percentage of the healthcare population. This generation is increasingly taking advantage of non-traditional options like retail clinics, virtual appointments and various apps, [according to media reports](#).

On the Horizon

[With CMS's recent update to the 2019 Physician Fee Schedule and Quality Payment Program](#), providing reimbursement to providers for remote patient monitoring services, the pendulum is swinging toward greater adoption of such telehealth or telemedicine services and the role of consumers in gathering and sharing that data.

The [eighth annual Spok survey of Mobile communications in Healthcare](#) saw the highest level of participation rates from clinicians ever; they represented 44 percent of this year's respondents. This year, 46 percent of respondents indicate that they are considering the extension of their mobile strategy to include patients and families; 17 percent already plan to do so—31 percent of these within the next 12 months and 69 percent within the next three years. They indicate that this expansion is likely to include:

- EHR/patient portal apps (75 percent)
- Telehealth apps (61 percent)
- Health and well-being apps (54 percent)
- Patient monitoring apps (43 percent)

They are well aware of the disruptive technology that is poised to impact how they deliver healthcare and monitor patient progress, pointing to such things as Google Glass™, real-time patient access to charts, telemonitoring, virtual reality/virtual health, artificial intelligence and voice-based assistants like Amazon's Echo, among others.

As healthcare consumers increasingly recognize the power and flexibility that DIY devices offer them, and healthcare providers realize the need to partner with, rather than resist, new offerings, opportunities are emerging for all.