

Healthcare IT News

Smartphones gain appeal with more docs

By [Richard Pizzi, Associate Editor](#) | 12/01/07 | SMART 1207

DALLAS – As mobile communications devices become ubiquitous in society at large, it shouldn't be surprising that physicians are using mobile technology at higher rates than ever before.

And soon, Internet-enabled "smartphone" technology may be leading the mobile pack.

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According to a recent study by the Dallas-based Diffusion Group, smartphones will become essential weapons in the physician's arsenal in the next few years. By 2011, the study estimates that close to 70 percent of active physicians will use smartphones, up from the approximately 49 percent of doctors that currently use the devices.

"The new breed of physician is technologically savvy, and the smartphone is considered just another part of the toolkit," said [Alex Kasten](#), Diffusion Group analyst and author of *Defining the Black Bag for the 21st Century: The Evolution of Mobile eHealth Applications*. "Physicians want devices and applications that will help them in their nomadic lives. They are looking to gain greater efficiencies at the point-of care setting."

[Kasten](#) defines a smartphone as a "converged multipurpose device" which features a combination of Internet access, e-mail access, scheduling software, a built-in camera, contact management software, accelerometers, navigation software, and the ability to read business documents in a variety of formats.

"The real challenge in the future will be allowing physicians to use their smartphones seamlessly among all the hospitals they may be affiliated with, and to ensure information security," [Kasten](#) said.

If used efficiently, smartphones can help physicians manage their clinical and information workflows, said [Gregg Malkary](#), founder of the [Spyglass Consulting Group](#) in Menlo Park, Calif.

"The possibilities of the smartphone in healthcare are really untapped right now," said [Malkary](#). "What we're really missing is the communications solutions that would provide individuals with a single inbox. The whole concept of unified messaging is so powerful, but today in healthcare, communications is anything but unified. The real opportunity for growth is in communications efficiency."

[Malkary](#) suggested that one roadblock to increased smartphone usage is the unfortunate fact that many clinicians would just as soon make it harder to communicate with them. He said that physicians who perform a lot of in-office procedures would lose money if their workflows were interrupted regularly. Hence the need for more advanced applications to ensure that the hardware doesn't become a burden.

Physicians practicing primarily in the office environment tend to use smartphones differently than those working regularly in the hospital, according to [Andrew Barbash](#), MD, director of neurosciences at [Holy Cross Hospital](#) in Silver Spring, Md.

[Barbash](#) said that, for physicians in the ambulatory care setting, quick access to drug information is high on the list of appealing applications. Physicians would also benefit from a smartphone's text messaging capability to communicate with other physicians currently seeing patients in the hospital. And a doctor might even use a phone's camera to take photos of a skin wound and e-mail it to a specialist.

Barbash said most physicians are not likely to use smartphones to access a patient's electronic medical record, however.

"I think with the rise of smartphones you will see doctors using e-mail and text-messaging much more often than they do now," said Barbash. "And they will certainly communicate with their office staff more frequently when away. As doctors see their colleagues using smartphones, more of them will want the technology. In fact, I'm really surprised that you don't see more phone companies engaging in front-end marketing to physicians."