

PHRs Help Patients Manage Their Health

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Personal health records (PHRs) are touted as a new technology convenience for patients. Yet, the use of electronic PHRs remains low, according to the May 2008 Markle Foundation survey. The report indicated that only 2.7% (representing about 6.1 million adults) have an electronic PHR. A majority (57.3%) do not keep any form of PHRs. The good news is that 46.5% (about 106 million individuals) said they would be interested in using an online PHR service.

Palm City, Florida-based Connectyx Technologies Holdings Group Inc is hoping to bridge the gap with its confidential and easy-to-use flash drive that allows patients to manage their own health information electronically. Called MedFlash, the device stores personal health information on a 2-in portable flash drive with access through the Internet to register and maintain all details of a PHR. The device retails for \$34.95 and requires a yearly \$12.95 subscription fee.

"We are on the cutting edge of health care technology, and we want to provide consumers a very manageable and affordable way to handle their personal health record," said Ronn Schuman, president and chief executive officer for the company. "It [MedFlash] allows users to easily keep their history, medication records, treatments, and lifestyle routines up-to-date on a device that they can carry with them."

In June 2007, the company acquired the assets of MedFlash LLC. The owner of the Oklahoma City company developed MedFlash for his wife who was diabetic. Schuman described the original product as a very simple program to store health information. A year later Connectyx deployed a completely new product. The goal is to develop a 3-tier

approach. Tier 1 is the currently available portable flash drive containing health information that individuals can carry with them. Tier 2 is the ability to access the information via the MedFlash Web site (www.mymedflash.com). The company is planning for access capabilities from cell phones and personal digital assistants. The final tier, which will be available later this year, will allow users to call a toll-free number 24 hours a day, to access their health information. This tier requires no Internet or flash drive as all members are given an identification (ID) card with an emergency ID access number.

The Web-based portal not only gives individuals the ability to keep their medical history, but gives them the ability to download magnetic resonance imaging, x-rays, and a host of other medical and lifestyle information. Schuman said MedFlash can help save lives and recommends the product for "all walks of life," including individuals traveling on vacation or for work, expectant mothers, and attaching it to a child's car seat. For individuals who are not computer savvy, a relative or caregiver can update MedFlash. The company also has a toll-free number to call for questions from 8:30 AM to 5:30 PM Monday through Friday and 24-hour online support.

Privacy is an important component of MedFlash. Users have the option to block individuals from seeing information. If accessing MedFlash via the Web site, an image of a lock is located next to each field where data is entered, with the option to lock or unlock the information. If accessing the information using a USB port, there is a "Make Private" check box on each screen that can be clicked to keep private. The company recommends with both options that if any medical or lifestyle information is important for an emergency responder to

know, that the information remain unlocked.

In the event of an emergency, first responders and hospitals can access the PHR by plugging MedFlash into a USB port and clicking on the text file "MyMedData.txt." They can use any text editor or any word processor to access the file and review a patient's health record. If the data are being accessed by the Web site, individuals should fill out the card that comes with their MedFlash. The card directs health care providers to visit www.Med-Flash.com to find critical information and click on "Emergency Patient Access" and enter the patient's emergency ID code.

The niche product recently became available at Kroger Co locations in Columbus and Cincinnati, Ohio, and northern Kentucky. The product is available at pharmacy counters and is the first electronic PHR device the Cincinnati-based supermarket operator offers, according to spokeswoman Rachel Betzler. MedFlash also will soon be available at select Fred Meyer stores, a division of Kroger Co.

As a commercially available PHR, MedFlash will be part of a PHR study conducted by Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School. "We were recently contacted by a research team that is reviewing the features and benefits of commercially available PHRs," said Schuman. Adam Wright, one of the researchers leading the study, said, "Our goal is to learn what features devices on the market have and how they work." 

