

# Smartphone apps are improving patient care

By Andrew Thomas

The health-care landscape is changing. Digital technologies and solutions have finally begun to infiltrate our system and are changing the way we receive care. Whether it is remote consultations, faster and more accurate diagnoses through enhanced photo technology or medication-adherence-tracking apps, entrepreneurs and progressive organizations are building innovative tools to make lives easier for both patients and practitioners.

In the realm of skin conditions, digital health-care apps are providing a new avenue for communication, education and treatment. And, given the visual nature of skin conditions, it makes perfect sense to leverage the power of the latest smartphone technology to make access to care quicker and more convenient.

## Education and engagement

Instead of having to resort to Dr. Google, digital apps provide a portal that connects patients directly to their dermatologist. There is enormous potential and value in digital tools such as **InTouch**, a smartphone app that allows dermatologists to follow-up remotely with their patients. Once an initial diagnosis has been given, the app opens up a



dialogue between patient and doctor in a private portal where questions can be asked, weekly photos to assess progress can be logged and notes can be shared back and forth. Being prompted to regularly record symptoms and take photos makes for a far more engaging treatment journey and encourages the patient to be an active participant in his or her treatment.

## Adherence

Feeling connected to a health-care provider is a huge determinant in not only patient satisfaction, but also treatment outcomes. If you have ever tried to lose weight, you will probably agree that it's a lot easier to stay on track with regular accountability to a dietitian or personal trainer.

Roughly 30 per cent of patients don't take their medication as prescribed, while another 50 per cent don't fill their prescription at all. Apps can help to rectify this problem by

informing patients about their specific medication protocols and, ultimately, hastening their recovery.

## Accessibility

The issue of access to dermatologists can be remedied, in part, by the **InTouch** app that provides the option for remote follow-ups. If more patient follow-up visits can be conducted through a "store-and-forward" system then more time can be dedicated to new patients in need of care.

As has been the case for every other industry, digital smartphone technology is increasingly adding both efficiency and effectiveness. Perhaps it's time to ask your health-care professional about the digital tools that are available now to improve your treatment journey. **CS**

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