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**CENTER FOR CONNECTED HEALTH MEASURES HOW
INTERNET TECHNOLOGY IS IMPROVING PATIENT SATISFACTION,
DISEASE MANAGEMENT AND MEDICAL EDUCATION**

New data presented at the American Telemedicine Association conference shows how online programs are delivering quality care around the world.

BOSTON AND NASHVILLE, TN, MAY 15, 2007 – The Center for Connected Health, a division of Partners HealthCare, one of the nation's leading integrated health care delivery systems which was founded by Massachusetts General and Brigham & Women's Hospitals in Boston, is presenting data from six new studies, demonstrating how Internet technology is improving patient satisfaction, disease management and medical education, during the American Telemedicine Association (ATA) annual conference this week.

Implementing a range of connected health projects, from remote monitoring, to disease and lifestyle management programs, and telehealth initiatives, the Center for Connected Health is developing innovative solutions to more effectively and efficiently delivery quality patient care where and when it is needed.

"We are generating new data, implementing new programs in a number of important areas and building the infrastructure for a healthcare delivery system that uses available consumer technologies to improve care and enhance patient and professional medical education," said Joseph C. Kvedar, M.D., Founder and Director, Center for Connected Health, and a Past President of the ATA. "For example, understanding physician and patient perspectives on how they exchange medical information, barriers to adoption and the impact of online tools and support groups is helping to shape our connected health initiatives moving forward."

Patient Perspectives on Remote Monitoring and Self-Care

Hypertension is a growing health crisis worldwide. Despite increased use and the documented value of online educational content, there is a lack of understanding of how patients perceive using the Internet to help manage clinical aspects of their own care. The Center for Connected Health conducted focus groups to assess patient interest and perception of blood pressure monitoring and an Internet-based feedback program to facilitate self-management.

Participants evaluated a program that combined self-monitoring with targeted messaging and graphical displays of blood pressure data. The results indicate that there is an opportunity to actively engage patients with hypertension, by establishing routine blood pressure readings, providing targeted educational content and offering strategies for reducing or controlling blood pressure.

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Focus group members also reported eagerness to have a better understanding of their own physiologic data and how their behaviors may impact it.

Key Factors for Physician Adoption of Online Hypertension Management

Although technologies currently exist to facilitate patient self-monitoring, secure email communication and online risk assessment, many physicians have not yet adopted these tools in their practices. The Center for Connected Health carried out an online survey of 53 physicians and a series of 10 in-depth interviews to identify key factors for successful implementation of e-health services for hypertension care.

This study found that current use of online tools varied significantly among physicians, even though they identified many aspects of hypertension care that were appropriate for online management. Half of those surveyed use email to communicate with patients, driven primarily by patient demand. Although 70 percent of the physicians surveyed reported that they would adjust drug dosing using online tools, only 30 percent were willing to initiate new medications remotely.

Key requirements for physician adoption of e-health services included: demonstration of equivalent clinical outcomes; reimbursement for online care; and integration with existing electronic medical records (EMR). Physicians surveyed also raised concerns, including security, legal liabilities and the volume of patient communication.

Podcasting Driving Physician and Patient Education

Each week, several hundred lectures, conferences and grand rounds are conducted at the Partners Healthcare, Harvard-affiliated hospitals, including Massachusetts General and Brigham and Women's Hospitals. In 2005, the Center for Connected Health began a pilot program using podcasting as a tool to facilitate physician education, recording medical residency teaching and grand rounds. Podcasting allows users to subscribe to topics and then 'pushes' the relevant content without requiring them to visit websites or download content.

Currently, the Center is producing broadcasts on a daily basis and users have accessed more than 125 different podcasts. This effort is addressing various issues, including privacy and timely production challenges, and demonstrates the value of using podcasting to consolidate rich educational information into convenient, widely accessible digital programs.

Telehealth Helping to Manage Diabetes Epidemic in Developing Nations

Diabetes is a growing health crisis in developing nations, with 228 million people expected to be diagnosed with the disease by 2025. The World Health Organization considers the diabetes epidemic a global priority.

Operation Village Health, an email-based telehealth program that allows U.S.-based physicians to support health providers in remote Cambodia, was established by the Center for Connected Health in 2001. Results from a retrospective case review provide valuable insight into local patient demographics, usage, and most common problems and diagnoses seen in this remote area of Cambodia. Discussion with local key practitioners has also helped to better understand local diabetes knowledge, attitudes, practices and beliefs, as well as contributing factors, disease management and treatment response.

The study findings support a cross-cultural, email-based program to facilitate diabetes management in remote regions of the world. This data is also guiding further discussion and development of strategies for prevention, care, education and application of this care delivery model to similar, underserved areas of Africa and other developing nations.

Measuring Success of Online Patient Support Groups

Psoriasis is a common, incurable condition that has a heavy psychological burden. Although social support and positive coping techniques are associated with better treatment outcomes, the psychological needs of this patient population are frequently not addressed. Many psoriasis patients limit social interactions and rely on the Internet to access online support forums.

The Center for Connected Health identified a number of online psoriasis forums and developed a novel instrument to study the key success features of support groups and their perceived benefits on disease severity and quality of life. The instrument also allows for comparison of people who participate in conventional support groups with those who use online forums. Data from this study will be useful in the future development of effective online support networks for people with psoriasis.

Project Management for Connected Health Programs

The growing field of connected health combines the complexities of technology development, clinical research and program development, presenting a number of challenges and risks, including resource allocation, time management, cost consumption, lack of documentation, maintaining focus, recruitment, adoption and overall awareness. These challenges can be effectively addressed through the application of validated project management methodologies.

Project management techniques can accomplish a number of important objectives, including setting expectations, defining desired outcomes, gaining approval from connected health champions, defining roles and dependencies and increasing accountability. The Center for Connected Health demonstrates how adopting project management principles has led to improvements in time and cost management, forward progress of projects, documentation and overall efficiency of program management in the area of connected health.

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About the Center for Connected Health

The Center for Connected Health (formerly Partners Telemedicine), a division of Partners HealthCare, is a leader in the use of technology to deliver quality patient care outside of the medical setting. Based in Boston, the Center for Connected Health is applying consumer technologies and online resources in innovative ways, to increase access and improve quality medical services and patient care. The Center for Connected Health also offers expert online second opinions and facilitates enhanced medical education and training through Internet technologies. Visit www.connected-health.org.

Boston-based Partners HealthCare is an integrated health system founded in 1994 by Brigham and Women's Hospital and Massachusetts General Hospital. In addition to its two academic medical centers, the Partners system also includes community and specialty hospitals, community health centers, a physician network, home health and long-term care services, and other health-related entities. Partners is one of the nation's leading biomedical research organizations and a principal teaching affiliate of Harvard Medical School. Partners is a non-profit organization. Visit www.partners.org.

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