A GUIDE TO HEALTHCARE AND MEDICAL APP DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

There’s A Medical App For That...

As digital and mobile technologies continue to evolve and grow in popularity, the healthcare sector is having to quickly adapt in order to meet the demands of the modern day patient and healthcare professional. Health, fitness, and medical apps are flooding the market at breakneck speed. At this current time, the Google Play store lists approximately over 8,000 medical apps, whilst the iTunes store has around 25,000 medical apps. This is quite a significant difference. I believe the main reason for this difference is because most app developers recognise that at present the vast majority of health professionals use iOS devices, and so wish to target those individuals. It will be interesting to see if over the next few years we shall see Android catching up as mHealth becomes integral to mainstream healthcare provision.

There are many obvious differences between apps directed at patients and apps developed as tools and medical devices for healthcare professionals. Business models, costs of development, regulatory requirements, and audiences differ significantly between the two. However, there are fundamental and important similarities between them which will ultimately determine their success. This paper will discuss the business benefits of developing an app; the various approaches to designing and building an app; ways in which you can promote your app to your target audience and how you can measure the usage and performance of your app.

Among the list of innovative mobile medical apps is one that lets doctors use interactive diagrams to show patients what’s happening with their bodies, where procedures will be done, and exactly what will happen during different procedures. Alternatively, patients can use this app to get doctors to provide detailed visual answers to their questions. There are also apps that allow patients to track their symptoms, measure blood glucose levels and keep track of their immunisations.

With regards to regulation of medical apps to ensure that they are safe to use, in the US the FDA issued its final guidance for medical app developers in September 2013. In the UK the responsibility for issuing similar guidance falls on the MHRA which is the UK’s ‘competent authority’ for following through on the directives from the European Commission’s Medical Devices Directorate. They are supposedly working on establishing new guidance but have indicated that its classification of mobile medical devices would be much narrower than the EC’s. In the meantime, it is up to app developers to carefully consider whether the app they are distributing constitutes a medical device and should carry the CE Mark.

I hope you enjoy reading this paper and if you’d like to discuss any of its contents, then please feel free to connect up with me on LinkedIn.

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