

## mobile health apps for patient care or engagement

Gregory T. Huang

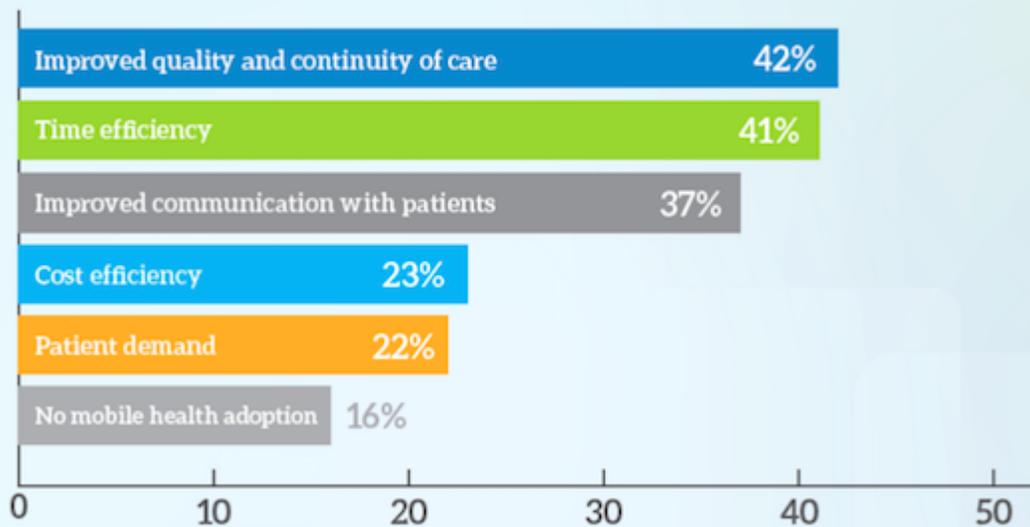
More than 80 percent of U.S. doctors surveyed use mobile apps or view professional content on mobile devices for work. That's a significant increase over the numbers from around a year ago, according to a new survey.

The main reasons for adoption? Improved patient care and communication, and time efficiency, doctors say. The [survey](#) was conducted by [MedData Group](#), a healthcare marketing company in Topsfield, MA, and involved polling 375 physicians around the country this month.

The findings reflect a general sense that [health IT services are picking up steam](#) among doctors, patients, and corporations—and that is driving increased interest from investors as well. In fact, 2014 was a record year with \$6.5 billion invested in digital health companies, an increase of 125 percent over the previous year, according to [StartUp Health Insights](#).

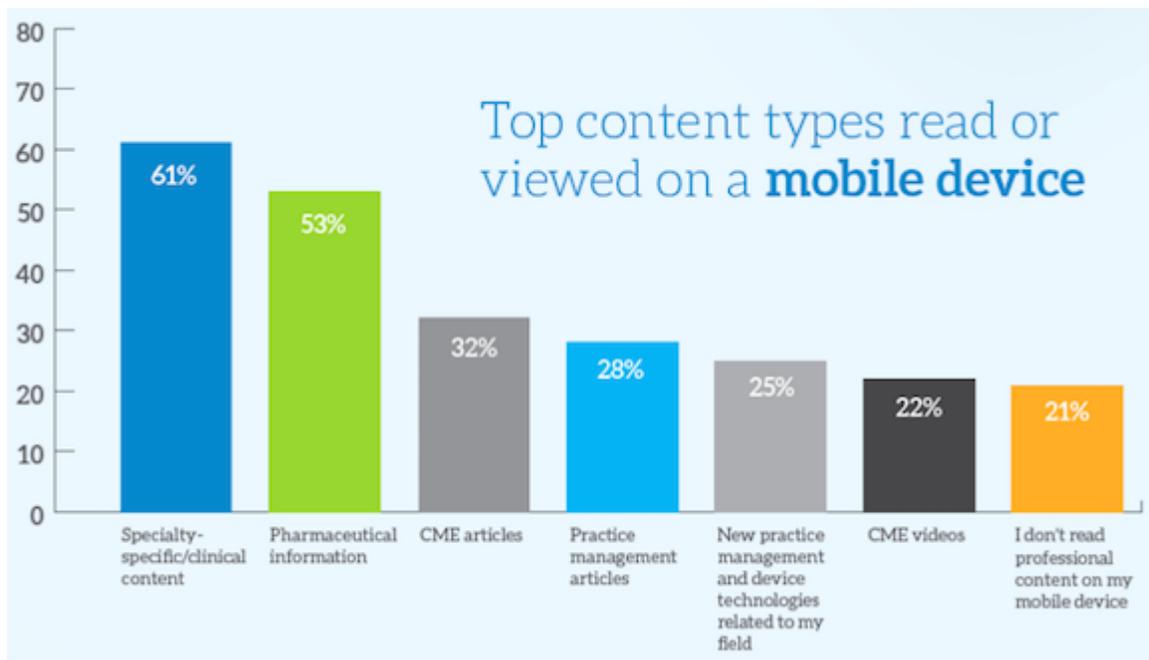
Healthcare is a notoriously slow-moving industry, but the MedData report suggests doctors themselves are driving big changes. The chart below shows only 16 percent of physicians surveyed say they have not adopted mobile health. That's down from about 33 percent in [a similar survey a year ago](#). (It's not a perfect comparison, because the pool of doctors has changed and the exact wording of the questions may differ.)

## Top reasons for physician adoption of **mobile health**



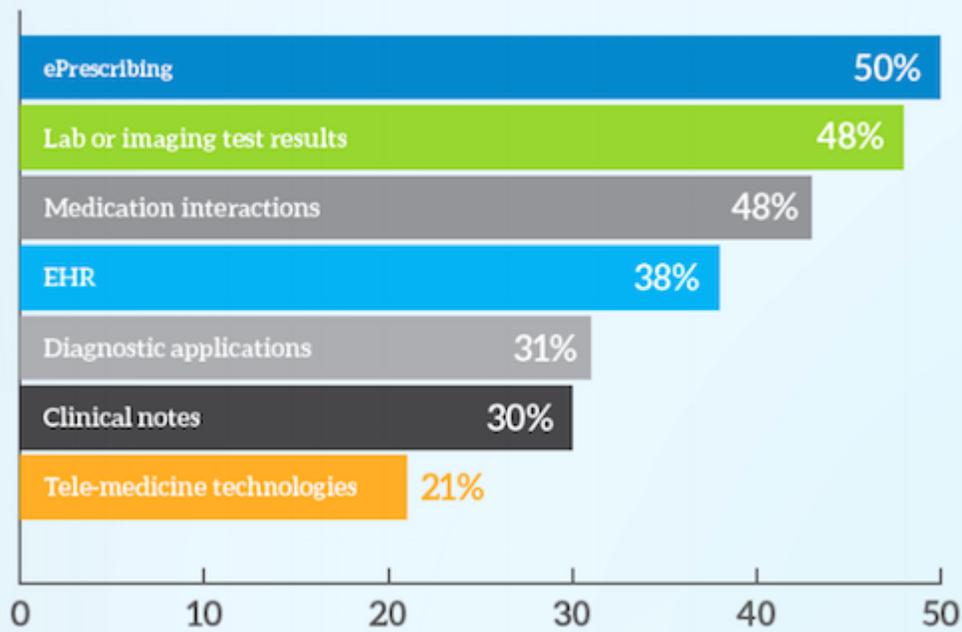
Another difference from a year ago is an increased focus on quality and continuity of patient care, rather than cost efficiency.

The new survey tried to dig into what kinds of content and apps doctors access on mobile devices. The chart below shows that clinical articles and drug information top the list of mobile content. Still, 21 percent of doctors said they don't read professional content on mobile.



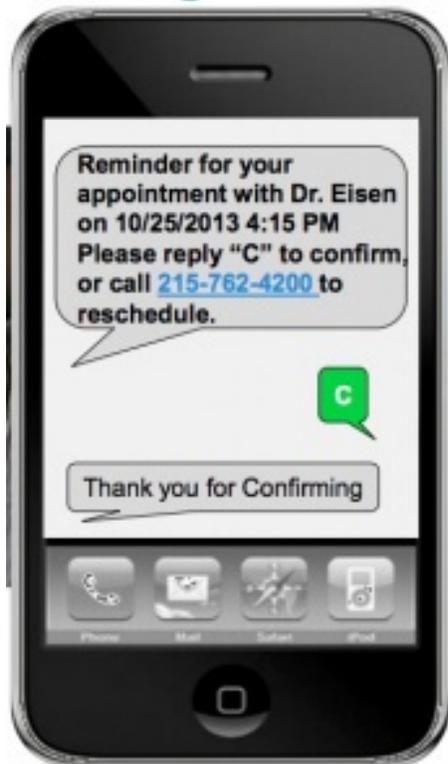
Last year, the big trend in what doctors were looking for was mobile access to electronic health records. And the most popular apps had to do with medication interactions. This year it's different: doctors predict that the most popular type of medical app in 2015 will be for electronic prescriptions—whereby the information can be entered into a mobile device and delivered electronically to a pharmacy. (That's followed closely by apps for lab or imaging test results, and drug interactions.)

## Predictions for the **most-used healthcare apps** in 2015



What the new survey doesn't address is the skepticism a lot of doctors have about adopting broader "connected health" systems that include things like interoperable medical records, health monitoring, patient-communication portals, and telepresence technologies. But the mobile component of such systems, at least, seems to be on its way to broad acceptance.

## There's a growing number of mobile health apps and app downloads



To date, 61% of people have downloaded an mHealth app. That's an astounding number, but it comes as no surprise. There's apps for everything these days, even within the healthcare industry. People want to know about their health, and healthcare providers want to be able to access information in moments that matter.

For example, Philadelphia-based Hahnemann Hospital conducted a pilot study that introduced a mobile app that supported email and text messaging to over 350 congestive heart failure patients. During this study, patients received email and text message reminders to get them to schedule follow-up appointments after being discharged from the hospital.

As a result, the hospital was able to reduce its 30-day readmissions by 10% that was a 40% improvement over their baseline. Readmissions

also decreased to 16% for patients who received messages, and the readmissions rate for those who confirmed an appointment was 8.8%, compared to 15.4% for those who didn't confirm. At the end of the 10-month pilot, it was clearly demonstrated that not only could mobile apps help patients to keep their appointments to get the proper follow-up care; it could contribute to reduced hospital costs.

Mobile health apps can be broken down into two major categories: wellness and medical. Wellness apps are typically used by patients, while medical apps are designed to be primarily used by physicians. Of the 100,000 mobile health apps in app stores around the world, 85% of apps are for wellness while the remaining 15% are for medical. Most apps are free to use or free to get started, but there's also a large portion of apps that are paid. Of the mHealth apps available in major app stores, 42% of them adhere to a paid business model.

The truth is it's becoming more of the norm to track health, whether as a physician, patient, or consumer. Apps like Apple's HealthKit and other health tracking apps make it easier to record health information within the app or integrate with other apps to get "closed-loop" reporting of health and fitness data. For example, HealthKit lets you track your heart rate, calories burned, blood sugar, and cholesterol. You can also see how many calories you consumed each day by integrating nutrition and fitness apps, like MyFitnessPal, or allow data from your blood pressure app to be shared with your physician automatically.

In 2014 alone, Research2Guidance reported that there were **over four million free downloads of mHealth apps every day**. That number is expected to keep growing.

By 2017, it's predicted that 50% of smartphone users will have downloaded mobile health apps.

# Conclusion

While there are still plenty of providers who aren't using mobile health apps for patient care or engagement, data shows that they need to catch up. The truth of the matter is that healthcare providers and insurers need to "get with the times" because mobile devices truly have the potential to improve patient care and health outcomes. Surely it'll take time for adoption of mobile devices in the healthcare industry to become mainstream; however, it's looking like widespread adoption will happen sooner than we think. Companies are already investing into the development of mobile health devices, as it seems new patient engagement apps are launching every day across the globe.

While the United States leads the market in mHealth growth, other markets are demonstrating growth as well. Asia-Pacific, for example, is predicted to **grow at a rate of more than 35%** making it the fastest-growing mHealth market. In an [Allied Market Research press release](#), the United Kingdom, France and Germany also collectively accounted for 45% share in the Europe mHealth device market in 2014.

Therefore, it's clear to see that mobile health technologies are increasing in popularity globally, and as a result, transforming the face of healthcare. So if you're a healthcare provider or organization that has yet to go mobile, you may want to consider these statistics and numbers, and make a change.

Have you or your organization adopted mobile health devices? Share your thoughts and comments in the box below.