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There is an App for That Too!

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Published in:
De digitale bibliotheek

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2013

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Brekel, G. V. D. (2013). There is an App for That Too! About-Medical-Libraries-and-Mobile-Apps. *De digitale bibliotheek*.

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There is an App for That Too! : About-Medical-Libraries-and-Mobile-Apps

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There is an App for that too!

About Medical libraries and mobile apps.

Having the right information close to you & quickly

What role can the medical library play in the dynamic, complex field of patient care, medical research and education? Especially the use of mobile devices (like the iPad) and applications are my topics for this paper.

It is a fact that the medical world in the deployment and use of mobile devices has been commonplace for years. Innovations in healthcare are usually created using new technologies. The first doctors with a Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) appeared many years ago at various departments in the University Medical Center Groningen. The library was still mainly trying to make the switch to the "all digital", the principle that all content had to be or become web-based, without worrying about mobile platforms and formats and / or standards.

In the early years an attempt was made to get one standard PDA inside the hospital, but the advent of the iPhone, other smartphones and of course the iPad, made this impossible to keep.

The usefulness of mobile

Within a large complex organization there are many administrative procedures, agreements, protocols etc supported by technological solutions -delivered via the organizations network and it-infrastructure- for managing all that information and business processes.

Where as PDAs just had a supportive role as a wireless extension of the standardized work with limited functionality, the iPhone offered the user -comparable with the web 2.0 development- , more autonomy, more ease in use and control with touch and gestures. The explosive growth of wireless high speed internet, but especially the introduction of the iPhone can be seen as downright "disruptive technology"

The motto 'if it can be done, we should do it` within innovative medical treatments often heard, can now, by individual employees applied to the entire process and communications (including towards patients) instead of completely relying on IT standards introduced.

The role of medical libraries in patient care, medical research and education is important, but will never be considered no 1 priority for doctors, researchers, support staff and attending. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that the library supports and facilitates these primary hospital tasks, processes and services as optimal as possible.

And this must go far beyond simple document delivery or road access to scientific information. For libraries to keep their heads above water, it is not good enough to just try and keep track of trends. In my opinion, scientific libraries should be more participatory in projects involving innovation at the workplace, stimulate integration of existing information, show initiative and work with the major players inside the organization. Have the library bring in a wide range of knowledge on information technology, both touching content, media and infrastructure.

The smartphone, wireless Internet and the iPhone have led to a huge demand for support impossible to be ignored by the organization.

People no longer see mobile devices as an extension of the computer, or as just another platform to see information & tools they already have access to. They experience them as a "magic tool" that will change the whole nature and structure of existing workprocesses in patient care, medical education and research. What those changes will be, they don't know exactly, but everyone wants to be involved in trial and discovery.

In a sense, the versatile iPad delivers a great innovative boost and incentive to the individual and by its massive use, also to the entire organization.

The "Magic of the iPad"

In February 2011 the Central Medical Library (CMB) of the UMCG started the 'iPad on Loan' project to enable more people in the organization to discover the capabilities of these devices.

8 identical iPads to be borrowed for 2 weeks, stacked with medical apps, e-books, e-journals and a variety of options for text processing and data entered in all its facets (workflow), search and communication. We not only want to know what the iPad can do to improve the primary processes of the individual employee, or where the boundaries lie in integrating with existing systems. We also want to find out -by short-interviews and evaluations- what they really need and prefer to use regarding information and library services. The direct face-to-face contact with a motivated, slightly excited, "fresh" iPad user leads to interesting conclusions and opinions on the device, on the content offered, but also on the usefulness and use of existing library facilities and services.

Patrons are particularly curious about "new apps". The number of available medical apps is already enormous and the predictions about the growth are that numbers will be rising rapidly. The comparison with the growth of the amount of medical information on the Internet is quickly made. There's just a lot of money in the medical industry in sales of medicines, instruments, equipment etc. This allows for a proliferation of apps aimed at consumers and medical staff. The library can do constructive work here by curating the world of health apps. Which existing providers already offer a library app, or a mobile-optimized website for you? How can I find quality apps? Where can I find out what others think about apps. Through evaluation at the end of every lending period, we get a good picture of which apps are really useful for any fields within the UMCG.

If I should take a chance in predicting the most possible outcome of the loan project, my conclusions would parallel the findings already drawn by an internal iPad-project team of the IT Department of the University of Groningen: The real magic of the iPad is not in the (medical) apps, but in improving the workflow and efficiency through simple facts such as the portability, fast startup, long battery life, the touch and swipe controls and the overall ease of use.

The Role of the Medical Library

Within the organization, the awareness of the iPad's innovative effect has grown significantly. The library is now, by the knowledge gained - involved in many initiatives within the UMCG. In support of this project we created a wiki to gather and share information.

The project stirred things up in the hospital quite a bit and many initiatives for use inside the organization have been launched; in patient contact; paperless meetings, medical education, etc...

In my opinion, the following topics will become important for medical libraries in the near future (if not already applicable):

1. The support and supply selection for mobile devices.

Libraries have always been rightly concerned with how information is delivered to the user. This includes not only the content but also the platforms and interfaces. The mobile use of Internet (browsing, search etc) will soon surpass the desktop use. So it's time to at least to make "our" information at least always optimized for mobile and -when creating or buying new content- focus on mobile delivery primarily.

"The mobile way will be the Highway"

2. New license variations will arise for buying and distributing apps,

very similar to the explosive growth of e-journals also experienced at the time. Can we distribute e-books through apps, or get access to our licensed information databases? What about site licenses or even national-wide access? The library has to be ready to play its role when -for instance- "Volume Licencing" for organizations becomes available. A hospital should also develop policies on the deployment and use of mobile devices that employees (and patients) entail. The library should be involved in Mobile Device Management since App data can also contain information the library already has purchased.

3. Integration of medical information in mobile apps and Hospital Information Systems (HIS)

Instead of a separate App or mobile site from the library, the integration in HIS systems and medical apps themselves will become much more important. The technology development in the ICT for Health is going through fast innovation itself.

This development makes integration of library services & information possible, including those so-called point-of-Care tools. With wifi available, the use of mobile devices, in healthcare, has also grown rapidly. The video of Daniel Kraft's lecture on the subject at TEDxMaastricht 2011, a conference on the future of health care, is staggering and a "must-see!"

4. The development, management and dissemination of "in-house" apps.

In your organization, pioneers are also developing and implementing their own useful medical apps. It is important to find these developers and cooperate with them to make timely integration with existing information systems possible. These apps will always consist of some level of medical information and healthcare processes. To be independent of existing platforms or external App Stores, and for future management and distributing, your organisation could develop an in-house Appstore system. Medical libraries will have to offer digital content that way too.

5. The use of mobile devices in education.

iTunes U is a good example of the digital and mobile provision of educational material. Mobile technology will change methods of delivery education, and very likely also the concept. The use of mobile devices in daily practice will be booming in the next few years. The number of medical universities that use iPads as default device in the curriculum is growing rapidly.

Both in terms of supply and use, the library should take a facilitating and advisory role, and if possible, a pro- active attitude. It is better to do something, than nothing.

According to Oliver Obst, German medical librarian ZweigBibliothek Medicine in Münster, the iPad loan project for libraries in public relations and marketing is the best idea since "sliced bread" ;-)

Links

1. "Ipads on Loan" CMB project wiki,
<http://ipadscmb.pbworks.com>

2. iPads, Mobile Libraries and Medical apps
<http://jeahil.wordpress.com/2011/05/16/ipads-mobile-libraries-and-medical-apps/>

3. "Ten predictions for the mobile health market"
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5. TEDxMaastricht - Daniel Kraft - "What's next in healthcare?"
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OhdUivs72zE>

6. iTunes U, iTunes for Universities
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9. ZweigBibliothek Medizin Münster "iPadAusleihe",
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(Translation of [Dutch article "Daar is ook een app voor!"](#) Digitale Bibliotheek, 2011(10) 14-18)

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