4 technology tools ObGyns can apply in practice

⤵ A boom in technology has yielded helpful tools to streamline your practice and keep patients satisfied

Ron Romano and Neil H. Baum, MD

Over the past 15 years a technological tsunami has swept through the health care industry, and few physicians were prepared for the changes wrought by this tidal wave. It now is clear, however, that we are and will have to continue to navigate a future increasingly powered and populated by technology if we are to be successful clinicians. In addition, we must learn to take advantage of all that technology has to offer without compromising the quality of care and compassion we offer our patients. We are fortunate that technology has much to offer to enhance patient care.

Mr. Romano is President of YourInternetDoctor.com and CEO of Instant Marketing Systems. He co-authored *The Internet Survival Guide for Doctors* (2014, Instant Marketing Systems) and *No B.S. Direct Marketing* (2006, Entrepreneur Press) and contributed to the *Walking with the Wise* series (2004, Mentors Publishing). He is an Internet marketing consultant, speaker, and creator of "The Implementation Blueprint System."

Dr. Baum practices urology in New Orleans, Louisiana. He is Professor of Clinical Urology at Tulane Medical School in New Orleans. He is also the author of several books, including *Social Media for the Healthcare Professional* (2012, Greenbranch), and *Marketing Your Clinical Practice: Ethically, Effectively, Economically* (4th edition, 2009; Jones & Bartlett). Dr. Baum is a Contributing Editor for OBG Management.

One big change under way: Technology is leveling the playing field between doctors—once the high priests of medicine—and ordinary people. SMART (social, mobile, aware, and real-time) technologies such as cloud computing will broaden the setting of health care interventions from hospital rooms and doctors' offices to patients' everyday lives. Cloud computing involves the use of a network of remote servers hosted on the Internet to store, manage, and process data, rather than a local server or a desktop computer located in the doctor's office. It is possible that, instead of being episodic, health care will be conducted continuously—and anywhere the patient wants it.

Without a doubt, the pace at which new technology affects our lives is increasing at lightning speeds. Today, 29% of Americans say their phone is the first *and* the last thing they look at each day, a telling sign of how dependent we are becoming on technology.[1] In this article, we look at 4 technologies that can be effective in the clinical setting, attracting new patients and enhancing productivity, communication, and patient care.

1. A mobile-friendly Web site

According to Wikipedia, there are 327,577,529 mobile phones in the

Regular versus mobile-friendly sites

The Web site of Neil H. Baum, MD, as viewed from a desktop or laptop computer **(A)** and a smartphone **(B)**.

United States, give or take a few thousand. As of July 4, 2014, the US population was 318,881,992. That means there are more mobile phones in this country than there are people![2]

Mobile phones are becoming more like personal assistants than phones. People are not just making calls, they're buying movie tickets, checking the weather, sending and receiving emails, texting, making reservations, checking Web sites … and the list goes on.

According to a recent report from the Pew Research Center, almost two-thirds of Americans own a smartphone, and 62% of smartphone owners have used it to look up information on a health condition.[3] Moreover, 15% of smartphone owners say they have a limited number of ways to access the Internet other than their cell phone.[3]

All the more reason for your Web site to be mobile-friendly. With a mobile-friendly site, the content is displayed in a more streamlined fashion on mobile phones, with larger type to make it more readable. See, for example, the **FIGURE**, which shows Dr. Baum's regular Web site side by side with the mobile-friendly view.

There is another reason why you should ensure that your site is mobile-friendly:

Google recently changed its algorithms so that, when someone searches for information on a mobile phone, only mobile-friendly sites make it into the top search results. Google wants mobile phone users to have a positive experience online. It is so adamant about this desire that it will lower your rankings or not show your Web site at all in search results if you fail to comply.

New patient acquisition is critical for any ObGyn practice, and we already know that just about everyone goes online to search for health information and solutions to their medical problems. If you want your practice to survive and thrive, you need to attract new patients online. If a visitor to your site cannot read the text and has to keep resizing the screen and scrolling left and right, you will lose that visitor in a hurry.

We all want to find what we are looking for quickly. In our experience, when we check Google Analytics reports for our ObGyn clients, we find that visitors to a non-responsive site spend much less time there and do not visit as many pages as they do when a site is mobile-responsive.

To check your Web site's mobile rating, go to http://www.google.com/webmasters /tools/mobile-friendly. Google also offers

FAST TRACK

Only mobile-friendly Web sites will appear in a Google search performed on a mobile device

tips on making your site mobile-friendly at https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/6001177?hl=en.

Once your site is up to snuff, you should test it from multiple devices to ensure that the pages are easily readable on all types of phones and computers.

2. Voice recognition software

Speech recognition is the ability of a machine or program to identify words and phrases in spoken language and convert them to a digital format. This tool can help you generate clinical notes and charting without having to stop and type into a computer. This can enhance your interactions with patients by freeing you from the computer during examinations and counseling and allows you to look at the patient and not at the computer.

According to data from June 2000, approximately 5% of physicians used speech recognition to generate text in their offices.[4] A white paper from 2008 found that approximately 20% of physicians are using more advanced, more reliable voice recognition technology and saving both time and money.[5] This report cited 2007 data showing that:

- 76% of clinicians who used "desktop speech recognition" (directly controlling an electronic health record [EHR] system via speech) reported faster turnaround time, better patient care, and quicker reimbursement
- Nearly 30% reported lower costs and increased productivity as benefits. The lower costs arise from reduced transcription and overhead expenses associated with billings and collection.[5]

The voice recognition software used in Dr. Neil Baum's office is Dragon Medical Practice Edition 2 (www.dragonmedicalpractice.com). Dragon requires a good processor and a minimum of 4 gigabytes of RAM and will run with VMware, Boot Camp, Parallels, and other programs for Mac users. The software contains 80 subspecialty medical vocabularies and is easy to install. After a few minutes, the program learns how you speak and will understand

you well with remarkable accuracy. However, to get the greatest benefit from the technology, you will need to invest in training, implementation, and workflow services to allow you to use the program to its full potential in record time.

Dr. Baum uses The Dragon People voice recognition software (www.thedragonpeople.com).

Although voice recognition software can reduce or eliminate transcription costs, improve documentation time, and boost the quality of medical notes, it is critical that you investigate how a particular program fits with your EHR prior to purchasing it—and a salesperson may try to gloss over this issue. In addition, the more you use voice recognition instead of checking off pull-down boxes for your clinical notes, the more difficult it will be to mine your data for quality metrics and pay-for-performance information. For that reason, voice recognition technology may be strongly discouraged by your employer or governing organization.

3. Online lab result reporting

TeleVox's automated lab results (www.televox.com/lab-test-results-delivery) allow physicians or staff to assign lab result messages quickly and easily with the click of a mouse. Patients call an 800 number or use an Internet connection to retrieve their results, using a unique PIN to ensure privacy.

Practices that implement this technology see immediate improvements in 3 areas:

- **Streamlined operations.** This technology allows lab result messages to be assigned to patients with a few mouse clicks, saving time spent on phone calls and mailing coordination.
- **Reduced costs.** Automated lab result reporting reduces staff labor and mailing costs.
- **Ease of access.** Patients have round-the-clock access to their information—no more waiting for mail delivery or a phone call. Patients also can choose to be notified when their results are ready, which helps alleviate anxiety.

4. Automated wait-time notification

The most common complaint patients have about their health care experience is the excessive wait times they often experience. Now there are technologies that can provide automated information to let patients know how long they will have to wait to be seen.

A program such as MedWaitTime (www .medwaittime.com) can alert patients about the estimated wait time at a cost of approximately $50 per month per physician. Patients access the service for free.

In addition, many EHRs include practice management features to notify the staff and physician whether he or she is on time.

These features may include a tie-in to alert patients as well.

The bottom line

Carefully selected technological tools have much to offer busy clinicians. By ensuring that your practice Web site is mobile-friendly, you stand to attract new patients. And the time you save with voice recognition software and computerized lab test result notification can allow you to spend more time with your patients. It can also help eliminate the lag in your patient schedule, keeping the women in your waiting room happy. Remember, a happy patient means a happy doctor! ⊘

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