



New app puts health records at your fingertips

Michael Oliveira

TORONTO— The Canadian Press

Published Wednesday, Jan. 11, 2012 2:20PM EST



When Apple released its game-changing iPhone five years ago, Dr. Wendy Graham dreamt about the possibilities the digital device could open up for health care.

And then years passed with no real appreciable progress in smartphones being used by doctors and patients.

So Ms. Graham began conceptualizing features she would include in her own app, based on her 30 years working in hospitals. Those ideas became Mihealth.

[Mihealth](#) is now one of the first pieces of software to be certified by the independent, federally-funded non-profit Canada Health Infoway. The “Mi” unofficially stands for mission impossible, an inside joke based on how Ms. Graham once felt about the prospects of delivering digital care in Canada.

Her app, which has been developed to work on iPhones, BlackBerrys, Google Android and Microsoft phones, allows patients to carry a digital version of their health record with them at all times, so it can be quickly accessed in case of an emergency and displayed for a health-care professional. It also allows patients to communicate digitally with their doctor by sending messages to the office instead of having to pick up the phone and fight busy signals.

When Ms. Graham launched her first beta test for the software in 2009 it took only 48 hours for more than 100 patients to sign up as eager guinea pigs.

“We learned there was great interest from the consumer side in being able to have a relationship with their family physician outside of the present relationship, that allowed secure messaging back and forth with the clinic and the physician,” Ms. Graham says.

“And secondly, the opportunity for patients to share critical records or information with people who are their advocates – their nurse, or a parent caring for a child, or a child caring for a parent in a nursing home – people wanted to have this information at their fingertips.”

There’s some optimism that the year ahead may bring advances in e-health technologies in Canada, giving patients new ways of accessing their health information and interacting with health care professionals.

But given the time it takes for these technologies to get tested and approved and then adopted by the medical community, it could be 2013 before any new products are introduced on a wide scale.

“Canadians’ No. 1 priority in health care is better access and we now are in a technological age which allows the use of (new) tools to improve Canadians’ access,” said Richard Alvarez, president and CEO of [Canada Health Infoway](#).

“But right now a lot of the work we’re doing in this arena, much of it is on a demonstration basis to show the value, the accessibility –there are still some issues to be overcome.”

To date, Infoway has issued just two certifications endorsing software that meets its standards for privacy, security and interoperability. Mihealth was the first to be certified under the consumer health application category, while [Telus Health Solutions](#) is certified under the consumer health platform category for Telus health space, a product that’s currently undergoing testing.

The service also allows patients to access health information online and chose whether to share the data with doctors and family members. Because Telus health space is designed and certified as a platform, other apps can be embedded within the service, such as [Bant](#), which helps young people capture, analyze and share blood glucose data.

Spokeswoman Janice Murray said she hopes the service could potentially be available to all Canadians late in the year, although sometime in 2013 might be more likely.

“What we are currently doing is pilots with several electronic medical record vendors across Canada, more specifically in Quebec and British Columbia,” she said.

“These are proof-of-concept pilots that are running right now to learn and to get it out there and gain feedback.”

As for Mihealth, Ms. Graham is now working to get doctors on board before making it available to the public.

Meanwhile, there are other one-off e-health projects happening in hospitals, including the [MyChart](#) web application at Toronto’s Sunnybrook Hospital, which hosts health information, test results and enables electronic messaging for patients.

Mr. Alvarez said there are still a number of issues that need to be sorted out before e-health goes main stream in a big way across the country.

“You can’t give patients access to records that haven’t even been digitized, so you’ve got to do that first,” he said.

“And there are some regulatory compensation and incentive issues that will need to be overcome before these applications can be widespread.”