

Pushing the Line Forward: The Use of Technology in Healthcare

Privacy is a funny thing, and peoples' choices about privacy when technology is involved is often hard to explain. We don't think twice about letting companies track what we like and don't; what we search for and when we search; the photos we like and the ones we don't; our shopping patterns and our wish lists; where we go and when; and now, we welcome full-time listening devices into our homes. I often wonder if these listening devices would find their way into our kitchens if they looked more like a reel-to-reel recording device versus a cute little modern orb with fancy LEDs.

Despite how comfortable we are with technology in some parts of our lives, there seems to be a line that many won't cross. For some reason, discussing our finances while the orb is listening is okay, but using technology to help us manage our healthcare strikes some people as going too far.

This line is moving, albeit slowly.

There are real challenges in advancing technology in healthcare. But most importantly, we need to allow consumers to choose how they want to see their health information.

Texting is common in healthcare today, but it is inefficient, and often, confusing. Most healthcare-related texts contain either redacted information, such as, "You have not filled AtorXXXXXXXX prescription," or contain links on which you have to click to take you to another message. Amazon doesn't make a customer guess at the contents of their message or follow a clunky process to share information, so why do we do it in healthcare?

There are a number of regulations that govern Protected Health Information (PHI), and it's critical that we take them seriously. After all, we're talking about very sensitive and private material about diagnoses, medication, diagnostics and other information.

But, with careful planning and execution we can balance what is required of us by law while providing consumers with information that will help make their healthcare journey more efficient and tech-enabled. For example, we were able to craft, on behalf of our clients, end-user agreements that allow us to send texts that look like this:

"Your health is important to [Insert Client Name], please take your cholesterol medication as prescribed."

The results from this texting pilot were nothing short of amazing. 26 percent of the people who received this message, none of whom were previously following their doctor's orders, promptly filled the prescription. Interestingly, we saw similar results in every category we piloted. Why? It's simple: nothing had to be decoded, no incremental steps needed to be taken, no password had to reset, etc. The best part of the pilot? 87 percent of the people who started, stayed in the program.

With pilots like this, we moved the line a smidge.

Texting was one of our first pilots and it was critical to challenging our thinking and finding new ways to solve old problems. The line needs to keep moving forward and we welcome the challenge.