

iPad, anyone? Hospitals looking at the mobile device

February 5 2010, By Bobby Caina Calvin

Apple's new creation, the iPad, may be a novelty to many consumers, but hospitals are already starting to abandon paper-and-pen clipboards for hand-held digital tablets.

In Sacramento, Kaiser Permanente is in the midst of experimenting with one brand of computerized tablets -- with the hope of freeing nurses and doctors from old-school tools and allowing them more time at a patient's bedside.

"We want our nurses to have time to actually nurse and support the patient. We want to remove the barriers ... to provide seamless technology integration," said Ann O'Brien, a registered nurse and Kaiser's national director of clinical informatics.

The trial being conducted in Sacramento is part of a broader program, dubbed "Destination Bedside." Kaiser expects to choose an electronic tablet by the end of the year for use at its hospitals nationwide.

The idea is to improve care and safety by providing up-to-the-minute medical information on the patient that can help prevent mistakes. X-rays, medical charts, prescriptions and notes would be readily available at a tap of a finger.

One tablet, the Motion C5, promoted by its manufacturer as a "mobile clinical assistant," is about the size of a small bathroom scale. It has handles and is equipped with a pen-like stylus.

"I love it," said Thomas Whiteford, a registered nurse at Kaiser's Sacramento Medical Center, who took part in testing the device. "I can sit next to the patient and do my charting."

The popularity of Apple's iPhone among doctors could be a natural springboard for the [iPad](#). But O'Brien, the [health care](#) giant's informatics director, said the device isn't even out yet to assess its potential.

Already, the iPhone has become a favorite tool among young doctors, who use many of the scores of health care-related apps, including encyclopedic information on pharmaceuticals.

Kaiser officials are considering whether the iPhone, now a ubiquitous accessory for hipsters and the tech-savvy, will become standard issue at its hospitals to more intimately bring technology to a patient's bedside.

Jason Wilk, who authors the technology blog [tinycomb.com](#), reported last week that Apple officials had visited a Los Angeles hospital, ostensibly to market their products. He presumed it was the iPad.

"Considering what happened with the [iPhone](#), it seems like it makes a lot of sense that they would be talking with hospitals," Wilk said, noting the mobile device's popularity among doctors. "You can do so much more with a larger screen, for medical charts. This is probably the future of computing."

Perhaps it's the future of medicine, said Dr. Javeed Siddiqui, associate medical director for the Center for Health and Technology at UC Davis Medical Center.

Nurses, doctors and pharmacists have already been using hand-held tablets, but wide-scale deployment would be expensive. The model that Kaiser is considering and that UC Davis is already using on a limited

basis costs more than \$2,000 per unit.

Many hospitals now use full-size computers and monitors mounted on wheeled carts, but these don't offer the same ease of use and mobility as hand-held tablets.

Laptops would seem an alternative, but aren't as easy to use as they would seem, particularly in a clinical setting where doctors and nurses are always on the go. And they aren't durable and can't easily be swabbed down for disinfection.

The hope among hospital officials is that electronic tablets will further power the technological revolution already under way at hospitals. And it's an obvious extension of the industrywide push toward paperless electronic medical records.

"Information at your fingertips is what medicine should be all about. It allows you to access information as you walk around or as you talk to the patient," Siddiqui said.

"The paper chart is an antiquated way of providing health care," Siddiqui said. "The paper chart is inefficient. It doesn't allow for rapid dissemination of information and really is no longer, I believe, the standard of care in health care delivery."

Siddiqui, if not caught up in all the buzz generated by Wednesday's product announcement of the iPad, is excited about the technological strides the device could spur in the medical industry. "It's portable and it's lightweight. It has touch screen, a Web browser _ and all those features can be utilized as a way to integrate technology in patient care," he said.

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