

Apple to tap iPhone users for medical research

March 9 2015, by Glenn Chapman, With Rob Lever In Washington



A screen shot of the new Apple Watch after Apple chief executive Tim Cook unveiled it during a media event March 9, 2015, in San Francisco, California

Apple on Monday unveiled an initiative to help researchers tackle some of the world's most critical medical conditions by gathering data from willing iPhone users.

The plan will use, on a voluntary basis, data from medical tracking apps to aid research on asthma, breast cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and Parkinson's disease.

The move aims "to transform medical research," Apple chief executive Tim Cook said, by gathering real-time data from millions of users.

In collaboration with large medical research centers, Apple will gather data through apps develop for its new ResearchKit platform.

The program may speed up efforts to collect and analyze data by using the iPhone for monitoring user movements, glucose level and other medical information.

The initiative "turns the iPhone into a diagnostic tool," said Jeff Williams, Apple's senior vice president of operations, at a San Francisco media event.

"ResearchKit gives the scientific community access to a diverse, global population and more ways to collect data than ever before."

More data, privacy protection

The program aims to help research by getting more frequent data than is available during conventional research studies, while at the same time protecting privacy.

"Users decide if they want to participate in a study and how their data is shared," Apple said.

To participate in Parkinson's research, for example, users merely walk while the app monitors their movements, or speak into the phone. Diabetes and asthma, meanwhile, can be tracked with devices that

connect to the iPhone.



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Jan Dawson at Jackdaw Research said the program appears to change the model for medical research.

"In the healthcare space, many companies have tried to use technology to transform key processes, but the focus has been almost exclusively on transforming them from the enterprise out," he said.

"What's unique about Apple's ResearchKit is that it works from the consumer-in. In other words, it empowers consumers rather than

healthcare providers and in the process changes the healthcare research model."

The data collected "will provide takes us one step closer to developing more personalized care," said Patricia Ganz, director of cancer research at UCLA's Jonsson Comprehensive Cancer Center.

"Access to more diverse patient-reported health data will help us learn more about long-term aftereffects of cancer treatments and provide us with a better understanding of the breast cancer patient experience."



Apple CEO Tim Cook speaks on stage during an Apple special event at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts on March 9, 2015, in San Francisco, California

An asthma monitoring app developed by the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai and LifeMap Solutions, looks for triggers for the lung

disease to help provide personalized treatment.

For Parkinson's—a progressive neurological disorder than affects movement and speech— volunteers who download the app and agree to participate in the study will allow for measurement of dexterity, balance and gait, voice and memory at multiple times per day.

"To have a dedicated Parkinson's disease app backed by research that will allow patients to engage with their care and receive feedback on their condition is amazing," said neurologist Ray Dorsey of the University of Rochester, one of the centers working with Apple.

"To make that data in the aggregate available for research is heartening. Five years ago this would have been inconceivable."

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