

PracticalApps.ca helps doctors choose the right app for patients

TORONTO, September 21, 2016 – PracticalApps.ca, a new website to help family doctors advise patients about health-related mobile apps, was launched today by Dr. Ed Brown, chief executive officer of the Ontario Telemedicine Network (OTN).

“About 40 per cent of patients suffer from chronic diseases,” Dr. Brown says.

“There’s technology out there that can help and we know that patients are more than willing to use it, just as they shop or bank online. The problem is, there are more than 165,000 health-related apps. People just don’t know which ones to use. Only about three per cent have been created by healthcare organizations. A lot of apps are completely ineffective and a few could even be dangerous.”

PracticalApps.ca, a collaboration between OTN and the Women’s College Hospital Institute for Health System Solutions and Virtual Care (WIHV), reviews mobile apps for chronic conditions like migraines, hypertension, diabetes, low back pain and insomnia to see if they have the potential to transform care. Designed to offer primary care providers – and patients – a critical look at mobile health apps, PracticalApps.ca is free and available to anyone. The reviews are conducted by family doctors who rate the apps for clinical validity, usability, privacy and security, accessibility, safety and reliability. Dr. Payal Agarwal, a family physician and innovation fellow at WIHV, created the evaluation framework.

“We know that patients are already using health apps,” Dr. Agarwal says. “As primary care providers we need to know more about which ones meet certain criteria for effectiveness so that we can offer better guidance.”

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For chronic illness, “this is especially important as one of the main goals is to help patients self-manage their condition. The ‘right’ app can play a key role in motivating patients to track their symptoms, share information and can even change behaviour.”

“OTN’s Telehomecare has, for years, pioneered virtual community health care by bringing remote monitoring for chronic conditions right to the patient’s home,” Dr. Brown says. “PracticalApps.ca is the next logical step. We’re helping doctors help their patients self-manage and monitor their health wherever they are, using their phone or tablet. Many of these apps also monitor and record important information that can be made available to inform the doctor’s care plan.

“The support that doctors need to manage patients and that patients need to self-manage chronic conditions is already in their pocket or purse. We know patients are ready to use that familiar technology. Through PracticalApps.ca, OTN is helping doctors actively engage patients in their own health care.”

Dr. Brown was speaking at Breakfast with the Chiefs, an educational meeting of executives, health providers and vendors in the healthcare sector sponsored by Longwoods Publishing.

The first PracticalApps.ca review looks at four migraine apps. New reviews, each focused on one chronic condition, will be published bimonthly.

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For more information, please contact Sharon Rose Airhart, Senior Communications Advisor, OTN, 416.697.6957 or SAirhart@otn.ca.

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About OTN

A world leader in telemedicine, OTN helps Ontarians get more out of the health care system by bridging time and geography to bring more patients the care they need, where and when they need it. Using innovative technology, OTN streamlines the healthcare process, while also expanding the way knowledge is shared and how the medical community interacts with each other and with patients. An independent, not-for-profit organization, OTN is funded by the government of Ontario. More information is available at www.otn.ca.

About Women's College Hospital

For more than 100 years Women's College Hospital (WCH) has been developing revolutionary advances in healthcare. Today, WCH is a world leader in the health of women and Canada's leading, academic ambulatory hospital. A champion of equitable access, WCH advocates for the health of all women from diverse cultures and backgrounds and ensures their needs are reflected in the care they receive. It focuses on delivering innovative solutions that address Canada's most pressing issues related to population health, patient experience and system costs.

The WCH Institute for Health System Solutions and Virtual Care (WIHV) is developing new, scalable models of care that deliver better outcomes for patients and sustainable solutions for the healthcare system. For the latest on cutting edge research advancing health system solutions, follow @wchwihv on Twitter. For more information, please contact Jennifer Lee, Senior Communications Specialist, WIHV, 416.323.6400, Ext. 3218 or Jennifer.Lee@wchospital.ca.