mHealth Past, Present, and Future: Practical Lessons

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Southern African HIV Clinician’s Society - 2014
mHealth: “the practice of medicine and public health supported by mobile devices.”

Sort of....
mHealth = mHealth Applications

• Many diverse applications
• Use similar infrastructure
• Some common activities

• Effectiveness is case specific
• A mature field is one where the merits of the individual application are scrutinized and the field as a whole is taken for granted
mHealth Past
- Lots of ideas
- Lots of hope
- Less data
- Less evaluation
- Pilots!
- SMSes
- Broadcast

mHealth Current
- Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) and costing
- Newer technology
- Users use data
- Government strategies and programme
- Interest in monetizing
- Recent version of past
mHealth Promise Hope and Reality

• “The evidence base for using mHealth to improve Maternal, Newborn and Child Health interventions in terms of health impact and cost-effectiveness is still nascent.” mHealth and MNCH: State of the Evidence William C. Philbrick mHealth Alliance, UN Foundation January 2013


• “A pilot study of an mHealth application for healthcare workers: poor uptake despite high reported acceptability at a rural South African community-based MDR-TB treatment program.” PLoS ONE; May 2013, Vol. 8 Issue 5, p1
mHealth Reality

- Health care worker and health system demands
- Unrealistic pilots
- Unfair comparison
- Innovations fail and fail
mHealth Future

- Faster, cheaper devices
- More users, savvy users
- Integration and linkage to action
- Apps, peer to peer, personalisation, Internet of things
- Public Benefit vs. Monetized
- Inclusivity
- Data privacy
Future mHealth Applications

• Clinic Wifi
• Non networked patient support apps
• Supply chain management
• “Fix my Clinic” feedback - linked to action
• Supportive supervision
• Device monitoring – cold chain, etc.
• Revisit failed applications
Metrics for defining what we should pursue

- Impact
  - Health
  - Population
- Does it work?
- Does it work at scale?
- Ease of introduction
- Obsolescence
- Cost at scale
- Integration with other systems
- Patient privacy and data security
How to speed mHealth Development for better Health

- Ask the right questions
- Department of Health education, strategy, and engagement
- Learn from others
- Coordinate efforts
- Consolidate wins
- Real world laboratories
- Proper evaluation
- Incentivizing development and experimentation
- Start! experiment, fail, iterate, improve

- Profitability: Business interests vs. Public benefit and Public Health
Conclusion

• The mHealth application is what matters
• Early days of mHealth applications
• Ask right questions develop rigorous meaningful responses
• Think scale
• Link to action
• Start now!