



## **Iatric Systems President Says the Solution for Healthcare's Patient Engagement Challenge is Already Well in Hand**

Veteran healthcare IT executive shares patient portal experience from his trip to the ER

**Boxford, Mass. – Sept. 1, 2015** – When a shoulder-first tumble onto the sidewalk turned Iatric Systems President Frank Fortner into an emergency department patient at the local hospital, he quickly found himself face-to-face with one of healthcare's greatest challenges – patient engagement.

The emergency department and orthopedist's office separately emailed Frank with instructions on how to enroll in their patient portals. Between discharge instructions, portal instructions and painkillers kicking in, Frank, like many patients, decided to do nothing except rest and begin the process of letting his profoundly separated shoulder heal.

What hit Frank the hardest, other than the pain, was the realization that everyone might be overlooking the quickest fix to getting patients to access portals as prescribed by Meaningful Use for view/download/transmit (VDT) requirements.

Providers appear to be doing the right things to engage patients. Hospitals have marketed their portals, distributed brochures, implemented additional staff for portal enrollment and training. Overall, hospitals have put forth a great effort, at no small expense, to encourage portal usage.

So the question remains, "Have we as an industry completely missed the mark with patient portals, or are we simply using the wrong technology?"

"With today's culture and technology, I believe the better patient engagement strategy is the use of smartphones and 'push' technology to actively engage patients where they live, work and play. All day long, smartphone users feel the familiar buzz of their device and read the notification of the moment. So why not feel that same buzz and see that you have a new report – click to view – and take a few seconds to view it," Fortner said. "All of that might take a few seconds, integrated into your daily routine and still add a point on the scoreboard for VDT. Once this type of communication becomes commonplace, it would only scratch the surface in terms of how providers and patients can engage each other."

While a natural retort might be, "Not everyone has a smartphone," the Pew Research Center in a December 2014 survey found that 64 percent of Americans own smartphones, and a growing number of people use their smartphones for Internet access. Add to that the plethora of customized apps for smartphones, and the hand-held devices seem to be, at the very least, a bridge to help healthcare cross the patient-engagement chasm.

There will always be obstacles to progress. Frank landed in the emergency room because he couldn't avoid his personal obstacle – a rambunctious 2-year-old Lab mix named George who spilled Frank onto the sidewalk. But Frank believes the healthcare industry can zig and zag its way to better patient-engagement outcomes.

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"I believe the market is starting to figure out that smartphones can be the de facto patient engagement technology. It should take months, not years, until we see a number of mobile, active patient engagement type applications that meet the spirit of Meaningful Use, but exceed today's results," Fortner said. "Even incumbent portals, in order to keep market share, will likely offer companion products for those who want the push-type smartphone experience. I can tell you, a mobile application would have made a big difference in my case. If, for example, I had the option to enroll my mobile device during those four hours in the ED, I would have done so out of boredom alone – or at least to take my mind off the pain. Today, I would have my imaging report, diagnosis and electronic discharge instructions in my pocket and available for the next provider."

Frank's personal patient-engagement experience was so motivating he decided to make it the first topic of an occasional blog in which he will share his thoughts and perspectives on a variety of healthcare industry issues. Frank's blog can be found on the Iatric Systems website at [blog.iatric.com/perspectives/patient-portals-wrong-target-or-broken-arrows](http://blog.iatric.com/perspectives/patient-portals-wrong-target-or-broken-arrows).

### **About Iatric Systems**

Healthcare is a complex and highly regulated industry with data spread across multiple systems and technologies, meaning decisions are made every day without complete information readily available. Iatric Systems is a healthcare technology company dedicated to leveraging our integration expertise to provide healthcare organizations with products and services that bring the right data to the right people at the right time. In our 25-year history, we have delivered more than 25,000 interfaces and integration solutions to more than 1,300 healthcare organizations. This integration experience helps healthcare organizations make more informed decisions critical to improving patients' health and organizations' fiscal stability. For more information, contact [info@iatric.com](mailto:info@iatric.com) or visit [www.iatric.com](http://www.iatric.com).

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