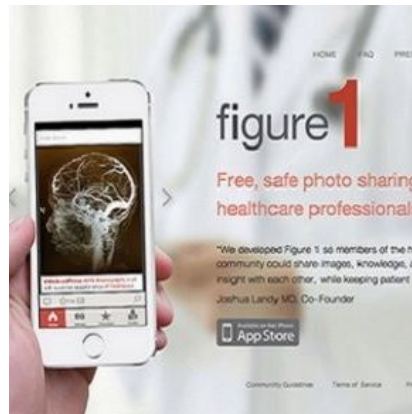




Figure 1: Crowdsourcing for Clinicians



As its name suggests, Figure 1 is a mobile app for sharing images. Medical professionals can upload photos, x-rays, biopsies and other images of their patients' health conditions or disorders. Figure 1, also referred to as "Instagram for doctors", lets colleagues chime in with comments, questions and potential diagnoses.

The app was launched in May 2013 by Canadian physician Dr. Josh Landy, who created the app following a medical research fellowship at Stanford University. Figure 1 claims it now has users in more than 100 countries, including tens of thousands in California alone.

While only licensed healthcare professionals can upload and comment on the images, anyone can download the free app to look at what's been posted.

"It's part of the evolving behaviour we're all seeing: using your mobile device to learn ... and expand your expertise," said Dr. Landy, an intensive care physician in Toronto. Being able to quickly share and discuss real-life cases with one's peers by smartphone "is our way of blending a proven method (of medical education) with modern-day technology."

Under a feature added in April, physicians handling an unusual new case can electronically "page" their colleagues in the same specialty and confer instantly over possible diagnoses.

"These sorts of approaches where you get assistance from your colleagues are a good way to go," said Dr. Peter Yellowlees, a psychiatrist and professor at UC Davis Medical Center, who wrote a book on medical technology. Doctors, especially in fields such as cardiology, obstetrics or pathology, have long shared photos of unusual cases, but a phone app makes that all the more possible, he noted.

Protecting a patient's anonymity is paramount, according to Dr. Landy. Physicians are "100 percent encouraged" to get a patient's permission to use a photo. The app has built-in tools that enable faces and identifying features such as tattoos to be digitally covered up. When a photo is uploaded, it is manually reviewed by Figure 1 employees to be sure the images are appropriate and contain no identifying details.

Aside from clinical images of patients, doctors also are using the app to share photos of new technology or clinical techniques in their hospitals or practices, Dr. Landy said. For example, photos of new robotic equipment, IV insertions and unusual surgeries have been posted. Also, a recent "Image of the Week" showed the repair of a major heart blood vessel using a patient's smaller veins.

Figure 1 is just one of the more than 150,000 mobile healthcare apps that are available in major app stores.

Some of these health apps are free (like Figure 1) and some are fee-based. Some apps are geared to patients; others are for exclusive use by the medical community.

Source and image credit: Figure1.com

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