# New JAMA article suggests review and certification process for mHealth apps

25 March 2014

While the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has released guidelines for the regulation of mobile health (mHealth) apps that act as medical devices or as accessories to medical devices, the vast majority of mHealth apps remain unregulated and unevaluated. In a Viewpoint article, "In Search of a Few Good Apps", published in *JAMA* on March 24, 214, co-authors, David Bates, MD and Adam Landman, MD of Brigham and Women's Hospital (BWH) and Adam Powell, PhD, president of Payer+Provider Syndicate, call for the creation of mHealth (mobile health) app review and certification organizations to evaluate apps that are not regulated by the government.

"This article gives health care providers, patients, policymakers and mHealth app developers a perspective on how the issue of determining which apps are most useful might be addressed," said Bates, who is Chief Quality Officer at BWH and chaired the Food and Drug Administration Safety and Innovation Act (FDASIA) Workgroup that made recommendations to the government about regulation of HIT and mobile apps. "Establishing an unbiased review and certification process is a key step in helping mHealth apps achieve their potential."

The concept for this Viewpoint article was conceived by Landman and Powell after discussing their mutual concern about the lack of oversight over the accuracy, quality, and security of mHealth apps at the BWH Hackathon, an event sponsored by BWH's Innovation Hub (iHub).

"Dr. Powell and I examined numerous mHealth apps and it was difficult to assess app credibility," said Landman, Chief Medical Information Officer for Health Information Innovation and Integration and an emergency medicine physician at BWH. "The currently available reviews of mHealth apps have largely focused on personal impressions, rather than evidence-based, unbiased assessments of clinical performance and data

security. With more rigorous certification criteria and unbiased accrediting bodies, both clinicians and consumers could be more confident in their selection and use of mHealth apps."

In the article, authors describe the potential for multiple organizations to be created that could review and objectively certify mHealth apps for quality, accuracy, security and safety, similar to the role that Health On the Net Foundation (HON), a non-profit, non-governmental organization, plays in evaluating the quality of online medical content.

"People are increasingly turning to their smartphones for assistance in improving their health, but are having difficulty determining which apps are the securest and most effective. We hope that our article will instigate action that will enable clinicians and patients to make more effective use of mHealth apps," said Powell, lead author of the article. "We foresee a potential future in which physicians will be able to confidently prescribe apps to their patient, and will have the tools that they need to interpret the resulting data. The establishment of an unbiased app certification and review process will play a key role in getting us there."

**More information:**
jama.jamanetwork.com/article.a … px?articleid=1852662

Provided by Brigham and Women's Hospital