

## Advancements in Mobile Health Technology

Mobile devices are playing a key role in transforming the efficiency, delivery, and access to the healthcare system. The number of mobile device users who have downloaded mobile healthcare applications nearly doubled, from 127 million in 2011 to 247 million in 2012.<sup>1</sup> According to the Deloitte Center for Health Solutions, technological innovations are changing the face of healthcare from “brick-and-mortar” hospital transactions and face-to-face doctor-patient visits to mobile, virtual experiences around the globe.<sup>2</sup>

Remote monitoring devices have been utilized in several ways, from allowing physicians to remotely access patient medical records and diagnostic test results, to tools used to address substance abuse, smoking cessation, and prevention of chronic diseases in underserved areas.<sup>3</sup> For example, glucose monitors and pedometers allow patients to be monitored real time by physicians and puts patients in charge of their own test taking, effectively reducing the need for potentially costly and time consuming office visits.

In addition to potential cost savings, a 2009 meta-analysis published in the Journal of the American Medical Association found that mobile devices improved physician response time, accuracy, data management, and record-keeping practices.<sup>4</sup> Other potential benefits of mobile health technology include tools to: overcome language barriers; increase patient appointment attendance rates by providing virtual appointment reminders; and, shorten patient emergency room wait time.<sup>5</sup> Further studies have shown that mobile healthcare technology has the ability to improve access to medical care in rural areas by allowing physicians to remotely monitor patients.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the potential benefits that mobile technology advancements appear to exhibit in the medical and public health arenas, the rapid growth and adoption of mobile health technology is not without certain challenges. Many consumers are concerned about confidentiality, privacy and security of medical information that is being transmitted via handheld devices. Further, regulatory changes regarding physician reimbursement and health insurance coverage for the utilization of mobile technology have not kept pace with the adoption of mobile health technology. Additionally, while the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is responsible for medical device safety and monitoring, it is unclear as to the FDA’s role in the

regulation of these new medical screening and diagnostic tools.<sup>7</sup>

Mobile technology is a growing industry, and is set to become a \$23 billion dollar worldwide industry by 2017.<sup>8</sup> As the opportunities for mobile health applications increase, so does the need for oversight and research into mobile health safety and security, as well as modifications to regulatory and reimbursement policy for healthcare providers utilizing mobile health technology. For example, a recent meta-analysis of studies regarding the effects of mobile technology on patient care, determined that further research is needed to definitively show improvement in sustainable clinical outcomes with use of mobile health technology.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, the challenges and barriers associated with this new innovation will need to expand and be addressed in order to better align regulatory, reimbursement, and policy updates with the utilization of mobile health technology in this emerging area of healthcare reform.

- 1 “mHealth in an mWorld: How Mobile Technology is Transforming Health Care,” By Harry Greenspun and Sheryl Coughlin, Deloitte Center for Health Solutions, 2012, p. 12-13.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 5, 14.
- 3 “How Mobile Devices are Transforming Healthcare,” By Darrell West, Issues in Technology Innovation, No. 18, May 2012, p. 3-4, 7-8.
- 4 “The Impact of Mobile Handheld Technology on Hospital Physicians’ Work Practices and Patient Care,” By Mirela Prgomet, Andrew Georgiou and Johanna Westbrook, Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association, Volume 16, No. 6, November/December 2009, p. 799.
- 5 Darrell West, May 2012, p. 5-6.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 West, May 2012, p. 8-9.
- 8 “The Effectiveness of Mobile-Health Technologies to Improve Health Care Service Delivery Processes: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis,” By Caroline Free et al., PLoS Medicine, Vol. 10, Issue 1, January 2013, p. 23; West, May 2012, p. 5, 6.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 8.



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**Robert James Cimasi**, MHA, ASA, FRICS, MCBA, AVA, CM&AA, serves as Chief Executive Officer of **HEALTH CAPITAL CONSULTANTS (HCC)**, a nationally recognized healthcare financial and economic consulting firm headquartered in St. Louis, MO, serving clients in 49 states since 1993. Mr. Cimasi has over thirty years of experience in serving clients, with a professional focus on the financial and economic aspects of healthcare service sector entities including: valuation consulting and capital formation services; healthcare industry transactions including joint ventures, mergers, acquisitions, and divestitures; litigation support & expert testimony; and, certificate-of-need and other regulatory and policy planning consulting.

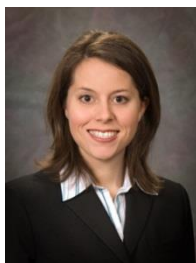
Mr. Cimasi holds a Masters in Health Administration from the University of Maryland, as well as several professional designations: Accredited Senior Appraiser (ASA – American Society of Appraisers); Fellow Royal Intuition of Chartered Surveyors (FRICS – Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors); Master Certified Business Appraiser (MCBA – Institute of Business Appraisers); Accredited Valuation Analyst (AVA – National Association of Certified Valuators and Analysts); and, Certified Merger & Acquisition Advisor (CM&AA – Alliance of Merger & Acquisition Advisors). He has served as an expert witness on cases in numerous courts, and has provided testimony before federal and state legislative committees. He is a nationally known speaker on healthcare industry topics, the author of several books, the latest of which include: *“Accountable Care Organizations: Value Metrics and Capital Formation”* [2013 - Taylor & Francis, a division of CRC Press], *“The Adviser’s Guide to Healthcare”* – Vols. I, II & III [2010 – AICPA], and *“The U.S. Healthcare Certificate of Need Sourcebook”* [2005 - Beard Books]. His most recent book, entitled *“Healthcare Valuation: The Financial Appraisal of Enterprises, Assets, and Services”* will be published by John Wiley & Sons in the Fall of 2013.

Mr. Cimasi is the author of numerous additional chapters in anthologies; books, and legal treatises; published articles in peer reviewed and industry trade journals; research papers and case studies; and, is often quoted by healthcare industry press. In 2006, Mr. Cimasi was honored with the prestigious *“Shannon Pratt Award in Business Valuation”* conferred by the Institute of Business Appraisers. Mr. Cimasi serves on the Editorial Board of the Business Appraisals Practice of the Institute of Business Appraisers, of which he is a member of the College of Fellows. In 2011, he was named a Fellow of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS).



**Todd A. Zigrang**, MBA, MHA, ASA, FACHE, is the President of **HEALTH CAPITAL CONSULTANTS (HCC)**, where he focuses on the areas valuation and financial analysis for hospitals and other healthcare enterprises. Mr. Zigrang has significant physician integration and financial analysis experience, and has participated in the development of a physician-owned multi-specialty MSO and networks involving a wide range of specialties; physician-owned hospitals, as well as several limited liability companies for the purpose of acquiring acute care and specialty hospitals, ASCs and other ancillary facilities; participated in the evaluation and negotiation of managed care contracts, performed and assisted in the valuation of various healthcare entities and related litigation support engagements; created pro-forma financials; written business plans; conducted a range of industry research; completed due diligence practice analysis; overseen the selection process for vendors, contractors, and architects; and, worked on the arrangement of financing.

Mr. Zigrang holds a Master of Science in Health Administration and a Masters in Business Administration from the University of Missouri at Columbia. He is a Fellow of the American College of Healthcare Executives, and serves as President of the St. Louis Chapter of the American Society of Appraisers (ASA). He has co-authored *“Research and Financial Benchmarking in the Healthcare Industry”* (STP Financial Management) and *“Healthcare Industry Research and its Application in Financial Consulting”* (Aspen Publishers). He has additionally taught before the Institute of Business Appraisers and CPA Leadership Institute, and has presented healthcare industry valuation related research papers before the Healthcare Financial Management Association; the National CPA Health Care Adviser’s Association; Association for Corporate Growth; Infocast Executive Education Series; the St. Louis Business Valuation Roundtable; and, Physician Hospitals of America.



**Anne P. Sharamitaro**, Esq., is the Executive Vice President & General Counsel of **HEALTH CAPITAL CONSULTANTS (HCC)**, where she focuses on the areas of Certificate of Need (CON); regulatory compliance, managed care, and antitrust consulting. Ms. Sharamitaro is a member of the Missouri Bar and holds a J.D. and Health Law Certificate from Saint Louis University School of Law, where she served as an editor for the Journal of Health Law, published by the American Health Lawyers Association. Ms. Sharamitaro has presented healthcare industry related research papers before Physician Hospitals of America and the National Association of Certified Valuation Analysts and co-authored chapters in *“Healthcare Organizations: Financial Management Strategies,”* published in 2008.