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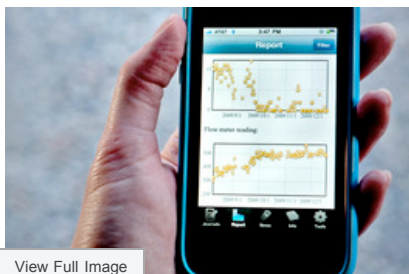
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By JOSEPH DE AVILA

Earlier this year, Mike Dionne signed up for Polka, a smart-phone application that lets him use his iPhone to keep tabs on the health of his elderly father, who lives 80 miles away. It tracks his dad's numerous doctors' appointments, his insulin and medication schedule and other health information.



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Matt Nager for The Wall Street Journal

The iPhone application Asthma Journal helps Eileen Serra of Dallas track her breathing data.

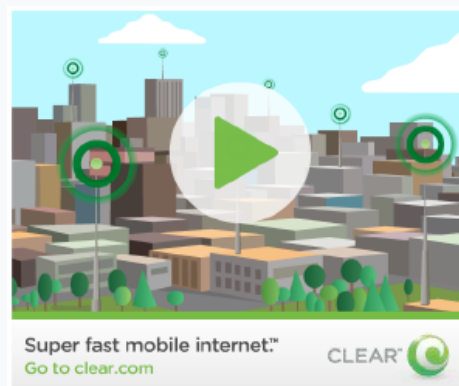
Then in August, a new doctor examining Mr. Dionne's father detected an aneurysm, something the son was able to confirm from afar. Over the phone, Mr. Dionne consulted Polka, the application he and his siblings maintain on behalf of their father, and was able to tell the doctor when the aneurysm was first diagnosed, by which doctor and the last recorded size.

"Before this, all I had was a note that was stuck in a paper file," says the younger Mr. Dionne, a 60-year-old retiree from West Barnstable, Mass. "Now the family has the

same knowledge base for some consistency."

Polka, TheCarrot.com and Ringful are among a number of new services that allow consumers to input their medical information and track their conditions using a smart phone. Particularly for the small but growing number of people who use electronic health records, phone applications are appealing because they can allow mobile access to personal information.

The market is nascent, however. Currently, only about 3% of U.S. consumers put their medical information online in personal-health records, according to Forrester Research. It's mainly up to consumers to accurately log their own health data. And some consumers may be wary of putting their health information online, although there have been no known cases of security breaches involving these mobile applications. Finally, "many clinicians don't want to rely on the imperfect data provided by health plans or input by consumers," says Liz Boehm, a health-care analyst with Forrester Research.



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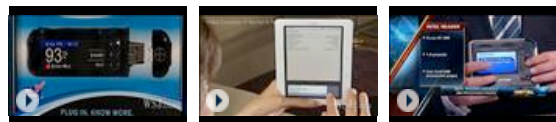
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Matt Nager for The Wall Street Journal

Eileen Serra links her Asthma Journal app to her Google Health online account, where she stores health information.

a 42-year-old graphic designer from Dallas.

Ms. Serra ended up using a free mobile application called Asthma Journal made by Ringful instead. "I always do it through the phone because I'm not always by a computer. It works better for travel," she says. Her Asthma Journal account links to her Google Health online account, where she stores health information. Now she can print records of her asthma conditions to take to her doctor when she goes in for checkups.

"The basic idea is to help users change their behavior with more transparency and information," says Michael Yuan, Ringful's chief executive. The company is based in Austin, Texas, and has about 19,000 active users. It also has apps to record blood pressure, pulse measurements and workout routines, as well as to find information about local hospitals. The company offers free versions of its apps and premium versions for \$4.99 with additional charting and analytical capabilities. Ringful will soon release apps for pain management and smoking cessation.

"The ability to deliver timely information to that phone and individual has an enormous potential to modify behavior and improve wellness," says Daniel Lewis, senior vice president of AllOne Health Group Inc., a Wilkes-Barre, Pa., company that makes mobile-health applications.

With AllOne Health's application called AllOne Mobile, users can view their medical history on the go, see prescription history and pharmacy information and receive alerts on medical appointments. It gives mobile access to existing personal-health records maintained by participating health plans and for users of Microsoft's HealthVault program. But right now the application is view-only; users can make changes to their health records using the health plans' Web interfaces, but not directly from the phone. (The company says it plans on adding this feature next year.) Right now members of Blue Cross of Northeastern Pennsylvania, Significa Benefit Services Inc. and Significa Insurance Group Inc. can use the application free of charge. Users of HealthVault, Microsoft Inc.'s personal-health-record program, can download it for \$25 a year.

"Mobile devices are going to act like your hub," says George Scriban, senior global strategist for Microsoft's consumer-health platform.

WebMD Health Corp. also plans on launching free mobile applications for iPhones and BlackBerrys that will let users view and update their WebMD record from their phone. "I think the use of a mobile device to share and store your health information has enormous potential," says Wayne Gattinella, the chief executive of WebMD. It's an interim step. While the WebMD mobile public-health record can't yet be integrated with physicians' electronic medical records, "it will be easily accessed and updated when you see the physician."

While these mobile applications help alleviate some of the inconvenience of updating and viewing health info online, many gaps still remain. Some doctors and hospitals are slowly converting patients' paper records to digital systems—systems built using technology that's currently incompatible with most-smart phone apps used by consumers. So at this point, the notion of a patient sending medical information to a hospital, clinic or doctor's office is still impossible for most people.

Still, many health professionals agree that getting consumers interested in their health will be beneficial in the long run. "We have fostered patient apathy," says David Brailer, chairman of

So far, the applications have been a draw mostly for people with chronic conditions, such as diabetes or asthma, or who have a specific goal, such as weight loss.

About two months ago, Eileen Serra's doctor told her she needed to start monitoring her asthma daily. This required her to log her twice-daily breathing measurements, which medications she was taking and what her symptoms were. "I tried to do it the old-fashioned way at first. To have to do that in the morning and the evening and write it down was really annoying," says Ms. Serra,

Day's Countdown
USB Meter
5:18

Not a Minute Later
5:09

Time to Read
6:36

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Health Evolution Partners, a San Francisco firm that invests in health-care companies.

Even if consumers record their health information for only a couple weeks, it's still valuable, says Douglas Trauner, founder of TheCarrot.com. "This is the first step to preventive care," he says.

Mr. Trauner released TheCarrot.com, based in Corte Madera, Calif., in November 2008. It offers more than 30 free trackers for blood pressure, cholesterol, diabetes and other health indicators. Users update the trackers through the Web site or with an iPhone. A BlackBerry version is in the works. The company is getting ready to launch a premium version of TheCarrot that give users additional tools, such as charting functionality, to monitor health and fitness goals for \$4.99 a month.

Right now, most of the site's users are people who want to be proactive with their health, Mr. Trauner says.

Sarah Doane added a few extra pounds after she moved to New York City two years ago. She ended up signing up for TheCarrot's free body-weight, exercise, calorie and energy trackers. "I wanted to see what I was missing. I thought I was living a fairly healthy lifestyle," says Ms. Doane, a 25-year-old fashion assistant.

About four or five times a week she records how much she has exercised, what she weighs and what she's been eating. TheCarrot has a large database of foods and their nutritional information so she knows how many calories she has consumed. "It is more to keep myself aware and in tuned with what I'm putting into my body and how it's affecting me," she says. It's helped change her behavior, too, Ms. Doane says. She's been drinking less, sticking to one glass of wine for dinner now, and has lost about five pounds.

Write to Joseph De Avila at joseph.deavila@wsj.com

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