

THE TOTAL PATIENT

DANA-FARBER CANCER INSTITUTE



A new role for technology in cancer care: iPads help patients endure treatment

Bette Weinstein Kaplan

How do your patients pass the time while they undergo infusions or other treatments? If they are not sleeping or talking with a friend or relative, do they watch television? Is reading popular? Are they looking for more information about their illness or treatment? Perhaps they find it relaxing to listen to music on an iPod . . . or simply to read a book or magazine they brought along.

SOMETHING NEW TO DO

The iPad, that technological darling from Apple, is currently playing an important role in the cancer treatment setting. Cancer hospitals are using iPads to help patients pass the time during treatment, as well as to educate them about their disease.

The Cancer Institute of New Jersey incorporated iPads into its Resource and Learning Center. The Center already provides information on such topics as cancer research and clinical trials, diagnosis, treatment, prevention, and nutrition via various media such as magazines, books, DVDs, and CD-ROMs. They recently added e-readers to the library, and now provide iPads preloaded with books, music, and videos. The use of the iPad at the Cancer Institute is two-fold: it provides current and relevant information about all aspects of cancer, and it offers entertainment.

“IT MAKES THE TIME IN TREATMENT GO FASTER.”

Patients can access the Internet and play games while they receive treatment. “The feedback we receive from patients using the iPad during their treatment is that their time in treatment passes more quickly,” said Leah A. Scaramuzzo, MSN, RN-BC, AOCN, associate director of Nursing and Patient Education at the Cancer Institute of New Jersey.

“A patient or family member can use an iPad to connect with other family members or friends, listen to music, read a magazine, play games, or simply browse the Internet,” said Janet Lasin, MLS, the Cancer Institute’s medical librarian. “These devices especially enhance services for those who are less mobile by allowing the library to come to them, should they be unable to come to the Resource and Learning Center.”

IN BOSTON: TWO DOZEN AND COUNTING ...

At the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston, the iPad program is a huge success. The devices are available to all

adult and pediatric patients and their family members for a 3-hour check-out during patient visits. They must be returned before the patient leaves. Apparently, that’s the only difficult part of the program—patients do not want to give them up.

Although iPads are really quite intuitive to use, the hospital gives patients some help to start them off. Volunteers provide a brief overview and an instruction sheet created by the Communications Department. Also, each iPad has tutorials bookmarked on the home screen for patients who might want to delve deeper. The computers are preloaded with chess, Sudoku, and other games, movies streamed through Netflix, a full library of music, as well as videos and information about cancer care at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute. They also include many popular news and entertainment apps.

HIGH-TECH HOW-TOS

The iPads are not used to provide guidance about medications or treatment, but they do offer bookmarked links to Web sites for support services, patient resources, and a calendar of events at

SEE THE ONLINE VERSION OF THIS ARTICLE TO LINK TO:

Video: iPads entertain Dana-Farber cancer patients during treatment
<http://resources.dana-farber.org/pr/media/archive-2010.asp>

THE TOTAL PATIENT

Dana-Farber, along with instructional videos such as planning for survivorship and even how to tie a head scarf.

“Many patients here at the Institute have to spend a great deal of the day with us in an infusion chair, with limited mobility,” says Janet Porter, PhD, chief operating officer at Dana-Farber. “We have televisions and reading material already available, but this is an extra way to help entertain them and pass the time.”

95% POSITIVE PATIENT RESULTS

Of 195 responses to an optional survey offered with the iPads, 185 respondents (94.9%) said they enjoyed the computer. Only 10 people (5.11%) rated the iPad as “no better than a book or magazine.” None of the respondents indicated that they “did not enjoy” the iPad.

100% STAFF APPROVAL RATING

Deborah Hoffman Toffler, the director of volunteer services at Dana-Farber, said, “We are thrilled that the iPad program has been so well-received

“[Patients] can just relax playing a game on the iPad while here for treatment.”

by our patients and families; we’re very excited to be able to provide a fun and interesting distraction to patients and family members while they are here for their appointments.” Nancy Hilton, RN, MS, director of

nursing and clinical services, concurs, “I think the program is terrific and my staff agrees. It’s nice that our patients have easy access to the Internet or to a book they’ve been wanting to read, or that they can just relax playing a game on the iPad while they’re here for treatment.”

According to Steven R. Singer, Dana-Farber’s senior vice president for communications, who proposed the idea and organized the program, “We have sought ways to improve on the patient experience. The iPads work well because they are comparatively easy to use, have a long battery life, and are quick and intuitive. They are also easier to keep disinfected than a laptop.” ■

Bette Kaplan is a medical writer based in Tenafly, New Jersey.