PREFERENCES AMONG PATIENTS FOR USING TECHNOLOGY TO COMMUNICATE WITH PHYSICIANS AND TO RESEARCH, TRACK, AND SELF-MANAGE DEPRESSION

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METHODOLOGICAL QUESTION ADDRESSED
This study determined how subjects with depression currently use telephone and internet technologies to communicate with their healthcare providers and to research their disease, how they think this impacts communication with their providers, and how they would like to use technology for these purposes in the future.

INTRODUCTION
Effective patient-physician communication and consistent self-management is essential for patients with chronic diseases to improve their health, compliance, and engagement in clinical care. A recent systematic review identified communication with healthcare providers as a key element of self-management support for patients with multiple chronic conditions. Good communication with healthcare providers has also been shown to improve health outcomes in depression. A study of patients with depression that were recruited into a collaborative care model in the primary care setting showed the level of psychiatrist engagement and frequency of in-person communication were positively associated with patient remission 6 months after enrolling in the program. Using technology can be one way to facilitate this communication and self-care. Our objective was to characterize how patients with depression currently use telephone and internet technologies to communicate with their healthcare providers and to research their disease, how they think this impacts communication with their providers, and how they would like to use technology for these purposes in the future.

METHODS
Subjects with depression participating in a large U.S. mode equivalence study (n=107) were surveyed independently of that trial. In addition to demographic information, each subject was queried on their familiarity with technology and preference for using it to communicate with their physician and to understand and manage their depression and general health. They were asked which method of communication they prefer their physician to use if they need to be contacted between visits, and whether they currently monitored or kept track of their disease. They were also asked what sources they use to better understand information their physician has shared with them. If it isn’t clear at first; what types of information about your disease they are most likely to research online about their disease might impact discussions with their physician. Finally, subjects were asked what kinds of information they would like to have available in a smartphone app that provided educational messages about their disease, diet, and other health measures.

RESULTS
Subjects ranged in age from 23 to 79 years and 45% were female. 47% of subjects reported owning a smartphone, and 90% of these subjects use it daily. 47% have access to a home computer, and 53% have internet at home. Almost half of subjects (48%) reported using the internet daily (Table 1).

If they do not understand information received from their physicians, subjects reported that they call their physician directly (47%), conduct internet searches on their own (30%), ask friends or family (20%), consult internet posts, online communities, or forums (32%), or support groups (31%). 23% reported that they would wait until their next visit to clarify with their physician (Figure 2). In a multi-select question, most subjects reported preferring a phone call from their physician (87%) if they needed to be contacted between visits, followed by an email (23%) or text message (21%) (Figure 3).

With respect to their depression, subjects were most likely to research information on current treatments (67%), and alternative treatments (57%), followed by disease complications (55%), the impact of diet (53%) and exercise (47%) on depression, and new drugs (31%). When asked how doing online research about their disease might impact discussions with their physician, subjects reported they would likely ask more questions about medication (66%), additional treatment options (47%), alternative therapies (35%), and new technologies related to their disease (25%). Only 17% of subjects thought that doing this type of research independently would not change their discussions with their physicians (Figure 5).

When asked about a potential smartphone application that would provide educational messages about depression, subjects would like to have the effects of foods or beverages (26%), new therapies (23%), alternative or new technologies related to their disease (26%). Only 17% of subjects expressed in this study) into clinical trials and care across more varied patient populations. Providers should consider these findings when seeking to engage patients in depression in the clinical care setting.

CONCLUSIONS
The results of this study suggest that many patients with depression currently use technology to gain more knowledge about their disease (including using internet searches and forums) and to communicate with their providers (through phone calls, email, and text messaging). Most patients with depression also think that using technology to research disease management on their own will increase discussion with their physicians. Patients with depression are most likely to research their treatment options and the impact of diet on depression, and would like similar information provided via smartphone app. Although this field of research is still young, recent studies have found significant effects of technology-based interventions on depression, particularly in patients who also have cancer. Further research should investigate the effect on health outcomes of implementing patient-centered eClinical technology incorporating the preferences patients expressed in this study into clinical trials and care across more varied patient populations. Providers should consider these findings when seeking to engage patients in depression in the clinical care setting.

REFERENCES

DISCLOSURES
The authors are employees ERT and/or owner of ERT stock.

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