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McLeod discusses role of mobile devices in nursing

By [Joseph Conn / HITS staff writer](#)

Mobile phones are more than a gadget for Renee McLeod and the nursing students she teaches.

"It's really a tool, like their stethoscope," said McLeod, the director of the Office of Transformational Technologies and Organizations at the Arizona State University College of Nursing & Healthcare Innovation.

McLeod led a discussion on the role of smart phones in nursing education at the 25th Towards an Electronic Patient Record show in Palm Springs, Calif., Tuesday.

Smart phones better fit the way nurses practice than hard-wired computers or even laptop computers, McLeod said.

According to a 2008 study from Spyglass Consulting Group that McLeod cited, 67% of nurses carry two or more mobile communication devices and 88% had three phone numbers. Nurses walk three to five miles per shift, she said. They also spend just 3% of that shift in patients' rooms and 81% at nursing stations.

"We need to reverse this," McLeod said. "Mobile technology is keeping us where we need to be, with our patients."

Computerized health records, meanwhile, "have not made the job for nurses any easier," McLeod said. "They have tied us to a computer in one area where we must enter data. I'm running in and out of exam rooms all day long. I need that information on my mobile device where I'm making that decision right there in real time."

Smart phones are already revolutionizing medical education, McLeod said, just as they will revolutionize medicine itself.

"Mobility-centric education transforms teaching," McLeod said. "In the Facebook era, teaching is interaction. No longer are we standing out there lecturing a bunch of facts."

As a faculty member, she says she no longer feels like she has to know everything.

"This is about teaching students how to access information and evaluate the information that they're getting," McLeod said, adding, it is also about, "how do you evaluate the software and stay up-to-date instead of keeping them dependent on somebody else to help them plug in their data? The information is out there for everybody. It's about what we do with the information we have."

Medical educators, in turn, will need to practice with the technology they preach, McLeod said, but so will practitioners themselves. For practitioners, the ability to handle information technology "defines who we are and what role we have with our patient."

"You will be Skypeing on your cell phone," McLeod predicted. "Patients will send you their vital signs. Providers can watch fetal monitoring on their cell phones. It's just going to be amazing what you'll be able to do with your patients."

McLeod, who said over the past 10 years she has gone through enough mobile devices to have a museum, presented a long list

2/4/2009

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of professional- and patient-focused applications already available for her newest love, the iPhone. Still, she said, all mobile devices are imperfect and offered a wish list of features that are not yet available.

Smart phone manufacturers need to add hands-free functionality, she said, and they need to be able to project an image on a screen, wall or table, so graphs and other information can be shared with patients without handing the device over to them.

In addition, really smart phone applications "need to learn how you learn and self-customize."

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