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## News

[Breaking News](#)  
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### Focus | [back to This week's issue](#)

#### Healthcare field uses wireless to ensure accuracy

by [EMILY MOTSAJ](#)  
 • December 01, 2003

Mobile computing is on the cusp of revolutionizing healthcare, according to Greg Malkary, founder and managing director of the Spyglass Consulting Group. Indeed, wireless users in many fields are recognizing the convenience and efficiency of mobile technology, and demanding that they be able to use the same wireless devices and services that they use personally in their professional lives. Healthcare is just one vertical market ready to take advantage of the benefits of wireless technology.

The Spyglass Consulting Group was created to help enterprises use information technology to optimize business plans and achieve goals. It recently found the healthcare field-often perceived as an inefficient business dependent on paper, rather than electronic record-keeping-provides convincing evidence as to how mobility can optimize businesses.

For "Healthcare Without Bounds: Trends in Mobile Computing," Malkary interviewed 100 clinicians at more than 50 healthcare institutions to study how mobile computing could, and likely would, impact the industry. Respondents included a number of medical specialties, different age groups and various levels of professionals.

According to Malkary, more than 90 percent of hospital organizations now use "antiquated legacy-based systems," including paper-based processes, at the point of care. Furthermore, healthcare organizations are facing more pressure

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- [Cover Story](#)
- [News](#)
- [Focus](#)
- [Opinion](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Global Wireless](#)

#### Editorial Index

- [AT&T Wireless](#)
- [Atlantic Risk Management Corp.](#)
- [Boost Mobile](#)
- [Cellular One](#)
- [Cingular Wireless](#)
- [CTIA](#)
- [Fryer's Tower Source](#)
- [Khronos Group](#)
- [Lightbridge](#)
- [Motorola](#)
- [Nextel](#)
- [Nokia](#)
- [Opera Software ASA](#)
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from patients and government organizations to improve productivity and reduce the risk of errors. Malkary said 1.3 million injuries per year and 100,000 deaths result from medical errors that might be prevented if more efficient records were accessible.

Malkary's results show significant interest from clinicians to use mobile computing in their daily jobs. In fact, nearly 90 percent of clinicians under age 35 use personal mobile devices and software to complete work-related tasks. Most of those standalone applications allow clinicians to wirelessly access drug reference databases, reference manuals and medical calculators.

More advanced wireless solutions could allow clinicians to wirelessly review patient medical records, electronically create and transmit prescriptions, capture and accurately record new procedures and diagnoses, and order lab tests and review results. These next-generation applications could also be integrated with existing legacy medical and financial systems, creating an organization-wide solution.

Recent news from Zix Corp. proves such solutions are being implemented. The company recently partnered with Connecticut-based managed care company ConnectiCare to provide its PocketScript e-prescribing solution to physicians at Grove Hill Medical Center there.

PocketScript, which is available on Blackberry and Pocket PC devices, allows physicians to create and transmit electronic prescriptions, review a patient's drug history, identify what medications a patient is currently taking, and view resources relating to drugs and diagnoses. The application also communicates with the office network to keep records updated.

The solution benefits doctors by providing them with instant access to patient information, reduces the time spent transmitting prescriptions and improves patient safety by eliminating possibilities for misinterpreted, illegible prescriptions or dangerous drug interactions.

Despite the benefits, however, significant barriers to the adoption of integrated solutions also exist. First, physicians—who do not communicate regularly with the hospital IT staff who would implement such solutions—have specific requests regarding the

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technology they use, and if those requests are not met, they will not use the technology.

For example, the device chosen must be acceptable to its intended users. According to Malkary, 99 percent of clinicians said they would not use a tablet PC, citing its large and fragile form factor, high cost and limited battery life. Study participants instead favored a Pocket PC, noting its convenient form factor. "It has to fit in a lab coat or they're not going to take it," said Malkary. Application complexity can also stall adoption. If the solution is too difficult to integrate, use and maintain, no one will use it.

In addition, funding presents an obstacle, especially for healthcare organizations, which have typically limited IT spending and therefore now require wireless connectivity solutions from the ground up. Malkary suggested hospital administration and IT departments might not be as interested in wireless systems because while they face the daunting challenges of funding the project and providing training, they are not the end users.

Finally, security concerns pose a major barrier for healthcare organizations, which must be compliant with strict Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) privacy rules. PocketMD, which provides mobile database management solutions to the healthcare field, and Fortress Technologies, which provides security solutions for wireless networks, made a recent announcement to combat this concern. PocketMD will use AirFortress' secured wireless LAN, which authenticates access at the network, device and user levels, to enforce privacy. The network will ensure hackers cannot intercept network data, view network addresses or interrupt service.

Despite the barriers to adoption, the healthcare industry is lucky in that it has several role models to follow, said Malkary. Mobile computing has found its place in the sales force automation, retail and transportation sectors. And although reluctance to invest in IT has technologically put healthcare years behind other vertical markets, Malkary predicted that by 2006, mobile computing in healthcare will be worth as much as \$1.2 billion, as devices, hardware, software and services are implemented to meet growing clinician demands and patient requirements.

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