

## SIGN OF THE TIMES: PART II

## Technology Convergence in Health Care

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One of my patients, Evelyn, was in Nashville attending her son's wedding. On the morning when she and her husband were to drive back to Ohio, she began having back pain. She showed her back to her husband, Richard, who noticed a terrible rash.

He handed her a mirror so she could see for herself. Evelyn is a nurse, and when she saw the rash she knew what it was—shingles.

So far from home, she had no idea what to do. Her husband suggested that she call her doctor. Evelyn lamented over calling. It often took forever for someone in the office to answer the phone. Plus, her doctor might not call her back until after 4 pm.

*Richard:* Hey, maybe you can send Dr. Patel a message over your phone. Didn't you say you downloaded an app to your phone that lets you send messages directly to him? Maybe you can even take a picture and send it along?

*Evelyn:* I could try, but what's he going to do while we're in the middle of nowhere?

*Richard:* It can't hurt to let him know.

*Evelyn:* Fine!

She opened the MyChart app on her phone and sent her doctor this message:

**To:** Dr. Patel MD

**Subject:** I think I have shingles

Dear Dr. Patel,  
I'm driving back from my son's wedding in Nashville and I think I have Shingles (see attached). If you get this message, please let me know what to do. It's really starting to hurt. Call me on my cell phone.

Thanks,  
Evelyn

record. He reviewed Evelyn's message with the photo attachment and then, with a single click of a mouse, opened her chart to decide on treatment options. After checking her allergy list he picked up the phone.

About 20 minutes after sending their message, Evelyn and Richard were driving down the roadway when their cell phone began to ring. She recognized the caller ID as the hospital.

*Evelyn:* Hello?

*Dr. Patel:* Evelyn?

*Evelyn:* Yes, it's me, Evelyn! I can't believe you called.

*Dr. Patel:* I got your MyChart message about the rash.

*Evelyn:* That's great!

Dr. Patel told her the picture she sent of her shingles looked pretty bad. Evelyn agreed. She had seen this type of rash with her own patients. But what could she do? He told her that the rash was just starting and that he wanted her to start using Valtrex as soon as possible. This medicine would decrease the pain and the rash.

Evelyn wanted to start using the medicine quickly, but she was in Kentucky and wouldn't be home until later that night. That would be too late, her doctor told her.

*Dr. Patel:* Tell me where you are.

*Evelyn:* What do you mean? I'm

*Evelyn:* What?

*Dr. Patel:* Maybe I can find a pharmacy close to you and call it in.

*Evelyn:* Louisville 3 miles.

*Dr. Patel:* What highway are you on?

*Evelyn:* Route 65.

*Dr. Patel:* Okay, let me see what I can do.

From his office in Ohio, Dr. Patel used Google to search "CVS pharmacy Louisville Kentucky." He told Evelyn that there were 10 CVS pharmacies in Louisville. He told her to hang on while he transmitted a prescription for her to the CVS at 432 South 4th Street.

*Dr. Patel:* Do you see an exit for Chestnut Street?

*Evelyn:* Yes, it looks like the next one coming up.

He told her to take the Chestnut exit and go west to South 4th Street. Turn right on South 4th, which was north. The pharmacy would have her prescription ready when she arrived. He told her he e-mailed her some online education materials to read about shingles and Valtrex.

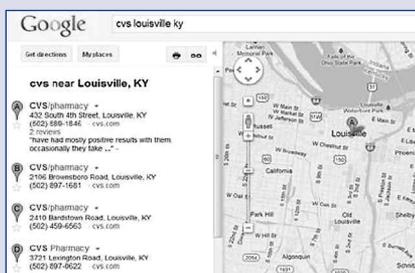
*Evelyn:* I really appreciate you calling me, Dr. Patel.

*Dr. Patel:* It's no problem at all, Evelyn. Just remember to take that pill right away. Please send me a message tomorrow to let me know how you're doing. Thanks!

*Evelyn:* Thanks, Dr. Patel!

Patient visits don't have to occur in a physician's office during set hours. They can happen anytime, anywhere. Getting Evelyn the medicine she needed right away limited her symptoms. It also prevented a manageable situation from getting out of control.

This physician-patient encounter was brought to you by technology—cell phones, electronic patient portals, electronic medical records, search engines, e-prescribing, and online map searches.



Dr. Patel was finishing up his work for the day when he received a new message in the electronic medical

in a car on the highway.

*Dr. Patel:* Read me the next sign you pass.