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Technology With Heart

The coming explosion of new wireless medical devices using Bluetooth low energy technology is the new face of health care.

When it comes to *Bluetooth* enabled medical devices, the future of home health care is here, and it's only going to get better.

Just a few short years ago, it would have been unthinkable for a chronically ill patient to board an airplane or go to a mall, or for an elderly diabetic to live alone without an aide. But today, with the help of *Bluetooth* enabled medical devices that help patients monitor their health and transmit critical data to health care providers, all of that – and much more – is possible.

The *Vena Inhaler*, from U.K.-based [Cambridge Consultants Ltd.](#), is one such device. Based on the company's *Vena* platform, which supports a set of standards chosen by the Continua Health Alliance to guarantee compatibility among personal health devices, the inhaler uses the *Bluetooth* Health Device Profile to send updates to caregivers or an Internet-based application via a mobile phone or telehealth device. The system can be used as part of a treatment diary to log when medication was used. It can also remind patients when a dose should be taken.

"Patients can view their treatment history along with other health data and use the information to better manage their condition," explains Vaishali Kamat, group manager, medical technology. "Health care providers and caregivers can use the records to support the patient and select the best treatment plan."

The system has further benefits in clinical trials where tracking inhaler usage can provide an indication of compliance to trial protocol and help in assessing the performance of the pharmaceutical, he added. The same could be said for many other *Bluetooth* enabled health care devices, such as blood glucose meters, blood pressure monitors, heart rate monitors, scales, electrocardiograms and stethoscopes. These products are just the beginning of what promises to be an explosion of wireless medical devices. According to [IMS Research](#) and [InMedica](#) (a division of IMS Research), the total number of *Bluetooth* enabled medical devices is expected to exceed shipment volumes of 150 million units by 2018.

The selection of this technology as the de facto standard for health device development by Continua Health Alliance last year will only help that number grow. Continua Health Alliance is a coalition of health care and technology companies committed to developing a system of interoperable personal telehealth solutions.

In addition to growth in the number of *Bluetooth* enabled health devices, Kamat says the industry will begin delivering mobile phone applications that support the Continua Health Alliance standards. The common transport standard provided by the *Bluetooth* Health Device Profile in mobile phones will enable significant growth of direct-to-consumer health services, he says.

As *Bluetooth* low energy technology becomes available in products in the coming months, the industry will be able to create wearable body sensors for health monitoring that use a mobile handset as the access point. And that, Kamat predicts, could open up a whole new world of wireless medical applications.

Karen D. Schwartz writes about the future of technology.

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