

10.01.19

The Latest Developments Driving the Transformation of Care

THIS WEEK



Innovative devices engage patients in their health — at home and on the run

Technology is helping consumers engage with their health as never before, opening new avenues to promote wellness and help them comply with their doctors' orders. Two recent examples: a companion robot to help consumers — particularly the elderly — with medication adherence and wireless earbuds that connect to a voice assistant to monitor things like distance run and calories burned.

In the rapidly growing robot assistant market, home products giant Black & Decker has teamed with Pillo Health to launch [Pria](#).

This voice-command device can schedule as many as 28 medication doses, provide alerts and dispense proper dosages. It includes a built-in camera and uses facial recognition and artificial intelligence to maintain security while sharing information through a mobile app that can be monitored remotely by a caregiver. It retails for \$750, which includes a one-year subscription

through Black & Decker's [website](#); thereafter subscribers pay a \$10 monthly fee to gain access to mobile apps, video calls and check-ins for caregivers.

As with many pill dispenser systems, Pria's distributors tout the peace of mind the system offers to users and loved ones who care for them, noting that the device is part of smart home devices to help seniors live more independently. But the device goes a step further in enabling caregivers to place a video call into the home through an app and schedule remote reminders or check-ins that Pria can deliver on their behalf, notes a FierceHealthcare [report](#).

Black & Decker is a financial backer of Pillo Health and will handle sales and distribution of Pria, which the tech company first announced at a conference last year. Pillo Health will market Pria to health care providers and other organizations focused on improving the health and wellness of patients at home. Still to be answered, however, is when or if information captured through Pria and its app can integrate with electronic health records to aid providers with such things as improving care coordination and patient monitoring.

Also trying to capitalize on today's more health-conscious consumers, Amazon reportedly is developing a new pair of Alexa-powered wireless earbuds that double as a fitness-tracking device. Named Puget, the earbuds are expected to include a built-in accelerometer to monitor activities like distance run, calories burned and running pace, [CNBC](#) recently reported, citing an unnamed source directly involved in the project.

While this may be a small step for Amazon, it could signal the company's desire to develop other products to help patients better manage their health. The Alexa access angle fits with Amazon's strategy to place the voice-assistant in locations beyond the home. The report notes that the earbuds support talking to the voice assistant outdoors. Consumers will need an Apple or Android phone to use the earbuds, because they don't include built-in cellular connectivity.

AMAZON TAKES FIRST STEP INTO VIRTUAL PRIMARY CARE



the health care market.

In what could be the first step toward a larger-scale play down the road, Amazon recently launched a pilot virtual primary care program called [Amazon Care](#) to give some of its Seattle-area employees and their families quicker access to care without the need for an appointment. Assuming the pilot goes well, Amazon will scale the program to more of its employees as it continues its quest to drive down health care costs and disrupt

Amazon Care includes a mobile app that provides access to virtual and in-person health care services from Oasis Medical, a separate legal subsidiary from Amazon, the parent company, [CNBC reports](#). The program offers an app that links to telehealth services and gives users the ability to request a visit from a mobile care nurse at home, work or other location.

This is the second significant move by Amazon to reshape how care is delivered to its employees. Last year, the company announced plans to open a primary care clinic in its Seattle headquarters and to hire a small number of physicians to staff the facility. Amazon also has been

working with JPMorgan Chase and Berkshire Hathaway on a joint venture called Haven to drive down health care costs.

This latest move is a test case of sorts. The Amazon Care platform is a small pilot and excludes employees who have Kaiser Permanente insurance through the company. And it's similar to ventures that companies like Apple and Walmart have taken in recent years.

Still unanswered is whether Amazon intends to expand this effort beyond its employee base and open primary care clinics with a Prime membership offering discounted rates for care, as some analysts have been theorizing. [Walmart's Sam's Club](#) recently moved in that direction, teaming up with several health care companies to offer discounts on routine care that customers might delay or skip because of the cost. Beginning in October, Sam's Club members in Michigan, Pennsylvania and North Carolina will be able to buy bundles of services that include discounted telehealth consultations, free prescriptions for certain generic medications and discounted dental care. Walmart also recently opened its first [Walmart Health](#) clinic in Dallas, Ga. The facility offers primary care, lab, imaging, dental and counseling services at sharply discounted rates from what patients would pay in a physician's office and other retail health clinics. The company plans to open similar clinics elsewhere.

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