iStayHealthy in 2013

January 9, 2013 By iStayHealthy

January is always the time for lofty New Year's resolution. Two years after its initial launch - it is time to brainstorm where to move next with the mobile app **iStayHealthy**.
The story so far has been a great success and I feel truly privileged.

- 5000 of you downloaded the app.
- More than 13000 liked/are fans of my Facebook page
- and plenty of you contact me directly via email to discuss issues, run ideas and suggestions by me.

But rather than running down a list of new features to stuff the app with - let's take a step back and go through why we think mobile apps can help us living with HIV.
Having HIV means we rely on continuous medical support and services - as with all other chronic conditions. At the same time a lot of our wellbeing is down to the decisions we can (and should) take as well as our behaviour.
For HIV this largely means, being aware of your status and your overall health condition. This awareness helps us, whether it is the decision when to start treatment, what treatment to select - or adhering to a treatment regime.

Most of us have mobile devices these days. And we carry them with us all the time. Having your health status and treatment reminders at your finger tips is just the right tool.

Still, we need doctors, clinics and pharmacists. Therefore a mobile health app, useful as it may be, cannot work completely isolated from clinical services. For that reason I have been in touch with clinical services in London/UK to see how and if we can work together.
Of course this isn't easy - or quick. Workflow and technologies in medical services are inherently complex. Demands on patient confidentiality, data security and integrity must be high. Introducing new technologies to clinical services, therefore, is a slow and incremental process. Health professionals are rightly cautious in adopting them.

Still, there is a lot of potential once mobile apps can be integrated with clinical services. Both for clinics and their patients. In 2012 I took the first step with one of the largest sexual health clinics in London - 56 Dean Street. After lots of discussions we started on the project end of last year to bring together their Option E service (emailing stable patients their results) with iStayHealthy app.
2013 will - I am confident - see an implementation of this running.

My discussions with the clinic - as well as many of the users - also highlighted another trend. Looking after our HIV condition is more than just monitoring CD4 counts and Viral Loads. As with any chronic disease, a more holistic view needs to be taken:

- What are the effects on other health markers such as cardiovascular risk factors, side effects from medication etc?
- What are the effects on my life style and what can I do to improve my wellbeing?
- How am I going to be affected by new treatment options, new legislation or any new information pertaining to HIV?

Finally - let's be honest. The popularity of "smart phones" aside (i.e. iPhone/Android) - most people on this planet can't afford to burn $700 a pop for a shiny new device. This holds for +ve people as well. Still, billions of users are on mobile devices - (called feature phones). By extending iStayHealthy services to more affordable devices I hope to reach out to wider parts of the +ve community.

Ok, so this is a long shopping list. Maybe I am a little overreaching to think that any single mobile app can address all of the issues I mentioned so far.
On the other hand, ambition is good, isn't it?
And if mobile technologies can help tackling the issues +ve people are facing in their daily lives, then all the better.

What's my big plan for iStayHealthy in 2013 then?

1. My top priority for this year is to get the app integrated with the clinical email service provided by one sexual health clinic in London. Once we've got that working, we can see how and if we can extend it to other clinical services.
2. iStayHealthy for Android/iPhone already allows users to enter more than CD4/Viral Loads. But there is only limited support for reviewing the results visually. The new Android/iPhone versions will support a more comprehensive user interface and overview over your health status.
3. Bringing iStayHealthy to smaller/more affordable devices. Even if not every feature currently available on Android/iPhone will be able to run - core features, such as treatment reminders, results lists, treatment selection should be possible.

So - let's get started.
Happy New Year everybody

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