

Kids, There's an App for That!

This morning, while watching the snow fall, a friend and I discussed making improvements in health education for the public using computer-based tools. We launched into this after a vigorous discussion about the merits and pitfalls of universal germline testing in patients with cancer and wondering how in the world you might automate genetic counseling to accommodate it.

This conversation got me thinking about what might already be available for patients with cancer, and I immediately thought about chemotherapy education. This is something our nursing staff provides in person to patients (and is available for specific cancer types through the NCCN Guidelines for Patients at NCCN.org/patients), but wouldn't it be nice to supplement this with an electronic tool, like an app, that you can interact with? Putting my Luddite nature aside, I actually searched for this in the App Store. And although I didn't find anything that met the spirit of our discussion, I did find a wonderful app that I want to introduce you to.

I was attracted to it because it had a cheerful cartoon figure, not too dissimilar from a *Despicable Me* character, with bright colors and the title *Kids' Guide to Cancer*. It was developed as an informational tool for kids with cancer or kids living with someone who has cancer. It's an Australian product sponsored by the Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation (www.newcastlepermanent.com.au/charitable-foundation), which supports activities that improve community health, especially for disadvantaged and at-risk young people.

Back to the app—which is free, by the way. I explored the whole thing. I figured that if you could teach kids about cancer, you could surely teach adults! Anyway, I found it entertaining, informative, sensitive, and extremely easy to navigate. The illustrations were dynamic and the language, while simple, did not “dumb down” the subject. In appropriate sections, the app introduced information about prevention, such as the HPV vaccine and sunscreen. So, while learning about the cancer that is affecting their grandmother, for example, kids can also learn something to help themselves.

The bottom line here is that we need more of these tools. Furthermore, we need the people who know how to make these tools entertaining to engage with us in their development. Yes, I'm talking about gamers. After all, there is a reason some folks are glued to devices for hours at a time—because it's fun! Why can't education be fun, too, even when it's about a serious subject?

This was a good exercise for me, and I found an app I can recommend to parents struggling to explain their situation to their kids. I always thought there was a void there. Additionally, I have new respect for computer-based learning, and some ideas about taking it to a new level with animation and rewards!



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