
Hamilton Hackathon

By Manisha Mulgund, MD, FRCPC

Hacking Health Hamilton Hackathon was a sponsored event held at McMaster Innovation Park during the last weekend of February 2016. The event aimed to link technology creators, business developers, established resources in hospitals and healthcare professionals together to create novel, human-centric solutions to problems plaguing healthcare in our society. It was indeed interactive and started with individuals presenting their ideas in one-minute presentations on Friday evening. Over the next two days, everyone was encouraged to join a project they found interesting and to build on it to do a three-minute presentation on Sunday, in the hopes of getting funding or support to move further with it. Over the weekend, we had access to mentors and the opportunity to meet others with innovative ideas.

My project idea was to improve patient engagement and education using an app. Another student partnered with me to bring the app idea to life for the presentation. The app was called “Rheumbuddy” and was meant for patients with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) who would have access to education about the causes, symptoms, management, and treatment options in RA. There would be videos for exercises, patient stories, and other educational videos to make it interactive. It was indeed rewarding to be able to conceive the idea and see it partially done. Of course, taking these ideas to completion is another ball game.

Some of the ideas that won funding and entrepreneurial support included replacing physician pagers in hospitals



with an app to sign off documents and to be more reachable and efficient; patient-centred research to rate success of apps used for weight loss and smoking and alcohol cessation so that healthcare professionals can assist patients in choosing the right apps; and simplifying technology so that people in retirement or nursing homes can see videos and pictures of their loved ones on their televisions at the touch of a button. High school students from Hamilton won the People’s Choice Award with their concept of a medication reminder app for a patient,

which is also connected to another user such as the patient’s family member, so that they can rest assured that the patient has actually taken his or her meds to improve adherence.

Overall, the Hacking Health Hamilton Hackathon was a fun, engaging weekend with many interesting ideas that will indeed help solve problems in healthcare. The only word of caution is that there needs to be clarity on the intellectual rights to property if these ideas are taken to the next level. I am sure that with increasing success of such meet-ups, the organizers will establish some ground rules on these issues.

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provided was outstanding. The organizers (Toronto Western Hospital Division of Rheumatology and the Sjogren’s Society of Canada) were inundated with requests for a repeat performance, and discussions are underway to consider another CME event in western Canada.

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