Ultrasound? There’s an App for That

By Liza Haar [4]

Philips introduces mobile, app-based ultrasound.

It is now easier than ever for nonradiologists to perform ultrasound (usually at the point-of-care or bedside), a trend that will continue to grow.

Randy Hamlin, vice president and business segment leader for Ultra Mobile, Philips Ultrasound, estimates that emergency medicine physicians have already been using ultrasound for 15 plus years. Emergency medicine physicians have their own credentialing and it’s become commonplace to see an ultrasound in the emergency department, he said.

“As that was going in, in recent years, you’re seeing more and more physicians begin to use ultrasound on a day-to-day basis,” Hamlin said. He cited internal medicine physicians and musculoskeletal or sports medicine departments as the new adopters of ultrasound. The trend continues to grow, even outside of the hospital, in what Hamlin referred to as “prehospital” areas, places like sports medicine clinics and urgent care centers.

Philips watched this trend grow and, in response, developed Lumify, an app-based ultrasound that uses mobile technology. According to a press release, Lumify offers “high-quality imaging on a compatible smart device through a subscription model…a new ultrasound approach [that] brings together mobile applications, advanced ultrasound transducer technology, integrated IT, training, education, and support services.”

Philips' Lumify

Lumify is not meant as a direct threat to the tradition of radiologists reading ultrasound, but it provides the opportunity for clinicians to reach patients earlier in the health care cycle. It brings an opportunity to save costs with its ability to identify treatment and next steps earlier, Hamlin said. Lumify is meant to be a complement to cart-based systems, Hamlin explained. He likened it to the relationships people have with their tablets versus their laptops.

“There is a time and place for each of those, but they don’t replace each other, they both do a lot of the same things,” he said. “Yet there are times when I want to spend a little bit longer time typing a document or creating content, and I’ll go to my laptop.”

With that said, Hamlin said that Lumify is versatile and able to handle a majority of situations. It lacks the elaborate calculations, measurements, and many features found in the cart-based systems, but Philips found that these elements weren’t necessary at the point of care. Lumify sits on a user-provided Android tablet, so it fits into the existing paradigm, Hamlin said. Payment is on a subscription model with month-to-month terms and no upfront fee or penalty.

This is, pretty clearly, an imaging tool created for nonradiologists. But Hamlin doesn’t see radiologists losing ultrasound as a modality. And it’s true, for the most part, that radiologists aren’t completely threatened by point of care ultrasound. Hamlin echoed sentiments by other experts that radiologists have a role as educators and to share their “incredible knowledge base.”

“Radiologists can play a great role in mentoring and creating credentialing guidelines for use of ultrasound outside of the radiology department,” Hamlin said. “And I think that’s the role that they can play in helping to make sure that the quality of ultrasound outside of radiology is maintained.”

Lumify’s system is a web portal that Philips intends to grow and add very specific apps that enable users to grow, as their competency grows with more sophisticated abilities, Hamlin said.
In the future, Hamlin also expects Lumify to work as a real-time connected device that allows the radiologist at a hospital to see live an ultrasound that is being performed at an urgent care center; the radiologist can advise what the treatment should be instantaneously. “This is an example of when the radiologist is touching the patient much earlier than they normally would in today’s world,” he said.

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