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# Consumer Health: Public and Academic Libraries Partnering for Community Events about Mobile Health Resources

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## Consumer Health: Public and Academic Libraries Partnering for Community Events about Mobile Health Resources

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In an effort to support new initiatives, the James Madison University Libraries and Educational Technologies began a series of small innovation grants in 2014. To promote engagement with the local community, the Psychology Librarian and the eBooks Coordinator partnered with the Head of Reference at the Massanutten Regional Library (MRL) for an innovation grant to develop a technology petting zoo, supporting technology and library e-resource literacy in the community. The Health Sciences Librarian offered additional support to this broader initiative by developing two consumer health-focused workshops that incorporated the same devices.

### The Sessions

The first session was a public event for library patrons and was promoted across the local Harrisonburg community and JMU campus. The second session was for librarians and library staff at MRL. The sessions were titled “Holding Your Health in Your Hand: An Introduction to Mobile Health Apps.” Building upon the hands-on, participatory tech petting zoo sessions earlier in the series, the Health Sciences Librarian developed mini-workshops around mobile health apps with a combination of presentation and preloaded apps for testing.

Examples of resources loaded on the different devices were:

- Diet and exercise apps (Fooducate, MyFitnessPal, FitBit, Loselt!)
- Mental health apps (T2 Mood Tracker and MoodTools)
- Drug resources (Drug Information Portal, LactMed)
- General resources (MedlinePlus, Pregnancy A to Z, Duke CPR)

In the presentation, attendees learned about the variety of ways to access information on mobile devices and some elements to consider when evaluating and selecting an app for use. At the broadest level, mobile health information could be a mobile app or a mobile-friendly website. The National Library of Medicine’s MedlinePlus is an example of a mobile website that customizes the interface for easier use on mobile devices. Mobile apps, like MyFitnessPal or MoodTools, require an account with an app store like Google Play or Apple’s App Store before downloading; other apps also require the creation of a personal account, connection to existing email or social networking accounts, and in-app purchases. Also, the type of mobile device will restrict app availability. Overall, the Apple App Store offers more options than Amazon, Windows, or Blackberry.<sup>1</sup> The content of health information can also range from general resources about many different diseases or drugs to more specific resources on a single issue.

The Health Sciences Librarian identified activity tracking as an important trend in mobile health. Users sync data gathered by activity trackers to mobile devices, or track activity directly through mobile apps. Common items, like the FitBit, offer ways to track physical activity and sleep throughout the day, while others, like The Leaf by Bellabeat, include tracking of menstrual

cycles. The Vicks SmartTemp Thermometer are other ways that mobile apps are connecting to common household health items.

After introducing these different possibilities for mobile health resources, the Health Sciences Librarian talked about issues of evaluation particular to mobile resources. When accounts are involved, users need to be aware of how their personal information may or may not be used or shared. The Food and Drug Administration regulates some mobile health resources, but only those that replace traditional medical technologies. For example, iBGStar, a blood glucose meter that attaches to your iPhone, falls under the FDA's regulation, but MyFitnessPal does not. So, many health apps are unregulated and unreviewed. We talked about reliable sources for health reviews, such as the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics App Reviews and iMedicalApps. Finally, drawing from the research literature,<sup>2</sup> the Health Sciences Librarian offered some successful strategies for using mobile health. Key elements included users setting their own goals, discussing their goals and technology use with their health care providers, integrating the technology into existing habits, and determining their information need. Following both workshops, participants could explore the preloaded apps on the different devices and see some of the presentation elements in context.

With this common framework for each workshop, the two sessions varied in their direction based on audience questions and group discussion. For the general public, interest in other areas of health, such as women's health and sex education, were key to the needs of local users. For the public library staff, other consumer health related information, such as identifying pills, were of interest. The session also allowed for further promotion of the JMU Libraries' Consumer Health guide at another point of need in the local community.

The health focused workshops proved to be successful offerings in the technology petting zoo series designed by JMU and MRL librarians. Engagement with the local community was a driving purpose behind the series, and both of the consumer health workshops provided unique opportunities to discuss access to health information, mobile technology, and library resources with the general public and professional colleagues.

## References

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