Digital Diabetes Prevention and Management Solutions

By: Jeremy Nobel, MD, MPH; Emily Sasser, MPH
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Northeast Business Group on Health (NEBGH) issued a May 2015 Solutions Center report, “Transforming Diabetes Management: New Directions for Employers,” that pointed to a number of new innovative approaches to workplace diabetes interventions, including digital solutions. Based on NEBGH members’ interest in better familiarizing themselves with these solutions, NEBGH conducted an introductory market scan and evaluation of a number of digital diabetes tools to serve as a useful entry point into this arena for employers.

Employers indicate that diabetes will continue to be one of their top concerns well into the future. They struggle to implement a mix of programs and benefit strategies that will be effective in helping employees prevent the disease or manage it once they have it. A spate of new digital tools in the diabetes space promises to help employers improve the effectiveness of their offerings, and employers have indicated significant interest in exploring them. However, they also say they are overwhelmed by the number and diversity of these new tools and need help evaluating which ones might be worth exploring for their employee populations.
Challenges Addressed by Digital Health Tools and Solutions

Digital health tools and solutions in general seek to address challenges common in addressing a range of chronic illnesses such as diabetes. They include:

- Employee/Patient Engagement: Features such as personalization and convenience, and the use of behavioral economics, to appeal to specific patient characteristics can increase engagement.
- Collaboration: Person-centered, team-based collaboration is more easily facilitated among users, clinicians, peers, coaches and others involved in care delivery.
- Behavior Change: Information, guidance and support delivered easily and consistently can help users sustain behavior changes.

All of which lead to:

- Better Outcomes: Digital health tools and solutions hold the promise of improved health outcomes and reduced healthcare expenses through improved engagement, better collaboration and sustained behavior change.

Employers are eager to see whether this promise is borne out through pilots and broader implementations.

Obstacles to effective implementation include:

- Participant recruitment and enrollment;
- Sustained employee engagement;
- Lack of integration with other health initiatives;
- Uncertain value or return on investment.

How Digital Health Tools and Solutions Can Make a Difference

Convenience

Digital tools and solutions “meet” people where they are – untethering them from a doctor’s office, weigh-in session, or desk – to communicate, and/or log and track information. Data and reminders can be provided “just in time,” delivering actionable support to users precisely when they need it. Peers, coaches and care providers can collaborate conveniently through messaging, social networks and video conferencing.

Personalization

Artificial intelligence and supporting algorithms enable information, guidance and support to be tailored specifically to a user’s biometrics, psychographics, relationships and behaviors to create a unique experience.

Data Collection and Management

Capturing clinical and psychosocial data continuously allows for seamless tracking and analysis by connected users, peers, coaches and care teams. Data is collected in multiple ways based on the capabilities of tools and solutions and preferences of the user. “Wearables” such as activity trackers, blood pressure cuffs or continuous glucose monitoring pumps can seamlessly upload data into the cloud. Other information such as diet and mood can be entered manually by the user. Automatic displays of customized information allows users to better understand trends and analyze the effects of behavior change on their health.

Behavioral Economics

With the increasing amount of real-time data available from connected devices and continuous data entry, digital tools and solutions can serve as a vehicle to deliver more customized rewards and incentives to drive engagement. These economic incentives can act as a catalyst for improved overall diabetes and health management.
Digital tools and solutions provide more opportunities for two-way communication than ever before. Programs may provide feedback and support through automated coaching and artificial intelligence or provide access to registered dieticians, certified diabetes educators, nurses or other qualified health professionals on an individual or group basis. Users have the opportunity to conveniently develop a trusted relationship with a coach and be more successful in their own self-management. Some provider-based care management tools and solutions allow a user’s existing care team to provide remote coaching.

### Socialization

Many digital tools and solutions engage people beyond an individual user and a coach by connecting them to a social network of people with similar health goals. Tools and solutions can provide social communities through private networks that allow them to share activities, goals and progress. Within some tools and solutions, users may permit friends and family to view and respond to their progress. Peer support, empathy and encouragement can increase self-efficacy and likelihood of sustained behavior change.

Within a rapidly transforming delivery system, many patients will begin receiving care from primary care providers incentivized on the value of delivery rather than the volume of services delivered. Digital tools and solutions can support both patients and doctors through this change via real-time monitoring of conditions, communications and support. Poor health indicators may be caught and addressed before an adverse event occurs, serving as an opportunity for early intervention to prevent behavioral and physical health relapses.

### Digital Solutions To Employee Populations: Many Delivery Choices

Employers and their populations may have access to a range of digital diabetes solutions directly, from third-party vendors, or through health plans and providers.

- **Health plans** collaborate with vendors to provide digital programs to members, often as an existing benefit or a buy-up.
- **Providers** may invest in a tool or solution to engage with all diabetes patients across a practice.
- **Third-party vendors** contract with employers to offer programs to an employee population or specific sub-sets. Pricing is often driven by performance against milestones or on a per-participant per-month basis.
- Many diabetes and prediabetes management tools and solutions are available **direct to consumers**, often online or in a mobile app store, such as iGlucose or Google Play Store.

### Terms used in the table

#### Educational Content: Diabetes-specific content generally delivered through:

- A personalized newsfeed based on a user’s preferences, condition, personality and behavior;
- Learning modules such as those in the CDC Diabetes Prevention Program; and/or
- A library of general information related to diabetes and lifestyle modification.

#### Personal Information Tracking: Biometric, behavioral and psychographic data are entered by the user and tracked in collaboration with care teams, including:

- Basic: diet, weight, activity;
- Biometric: blood sugar, blood pressure;
- Advanced: mood/emotion, medication management, goal setting and tracking.

#### Social: Users connect with peers through:

- Allowing specific friends/family to view and comment on progress and information remotely,
- Providing support to a group of individuals progressing through a program together on a periodic basis,
- A social network similar to Facebook;
- Competitions through which users compete in weight loss or healthy behaviors.

#### Coaching and Clinicians: Support is delivered through:

- Live coaches employed by the company;
- Algorithm-driven virtual coach;
- A user’s existing provider.

### Solutions are categorized based on primary capability, but many companies offer more than one solution.

#### Primary Capabilities:

- Digital Group-Based Health Course with Live Coaches
- Integrated Glucometer with Enhanced Communication Feature
- Scripted Algorithm Driven Coaching
- Device Data Download and Display
- Provider-Based Care Management Platform
- Individualized Live Coaching

### HOW TO USE THE FOLLOWING TABLE:

Benefit professionals may use this table as a sample of some notable digital diabetes tools and solutions and the features they offer. It is not intended to be an exhaustive list of every diabetes or prediabetes management solution on the market, nor does the “engagement indicator” reflect the overall value or efficacy of a solution or company. Information was captured through online marketing materials, a brief survey completed by a number of vendors, and phone calls conducted by NEBGH staff. Programs may have more capabilities than those indicated in the table.

Hopefully, the table will help guide employers as they determine what digital features are most important in addressing the challenges they face with workplace diabetes programs, and provide a starting point as they seek to identify solutions that match up accordingly.
## Digital Diabetes Prevention and Management Solutions

### OVERVIEW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRIMARY CAPABILITY: Digital Group-Based Health Course with Live Coaches**</th>
<th>ENGAGEMENT INDICATOR</th>
<th>PERSONAL INFORMATION TRACKING</th>
<th>SOCIAL</th>
<th>COACHING &amp; CLINICIANS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blue Mesa Health</strong>&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt; A digital platform to deliver the CDC’s Diabetes Prevention Program. The platform facilitates peer support and provides coaching through various media, including video and messaging. Users receive activity trackers and a digital scale. <strong>DELIVERY METHOD:</strong> E HP P</td>
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<td><strong>Canary Health</strong>&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt; Two diabetes-related programs including an online platform to deliver the CDC’s Diabetes Prevention Program and a Chronic Disease Self-Management Program that can be tailored to users with diabetes. <strong>DELIVERY METHOD:</strong> HP P</td>
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<td><strong>CAPP (My Dietitian)</strong>&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt; A digital platform connecting users to a registered dietitian through video, messaging and email every day. My Dietitian also supports the CAPP program, a platform to deliver the CDC’s Diabetes Prevention Program. <strong>DELIVERY METHOD:</strong> E HP</td>
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<td><strong>Melon Health</strong>&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt; A platform for chronic disease prevention and management that can be tailored for an employer’s specific population health needs. Melon Health’s basic platform delivers virtual courses for diabetes prevention. <strong>DELIVERY METHOD:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Novu</strong> Artificial intelligence and human coach combined to encourage sustained behavior change for weight loss and diabetes prevention. Novu delivers the CDC’s Diabetes Prevention Program in addition to individual support for diabetes and tailored population health programs for employers. <strong>DELIVERY METHOD:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Prevent (Omada Health)</strong>&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt; A digital platform to deliver the CDC’s Diabetes Prevention Program. Coach and peer support is enabled through messaging and video. Users receive a wireless scale, activity tracker and exercise equipment. <strong>DELIVERY METHOD:</strong> P</td>
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### PRIMARY CAPABILITY: Integrated Glucometer with Enhanced Communication Features

| **Livongo**<sup>*</sup> Remote diabetes management and coaching through a cellular-enabled “smart” glucometer, eliminating the need for smart phones or Wi-Fi. **DELIVERY METHOD:** E HP P | | | | |
| **Telcare** Remote diabetes management through a cellular-enabled “smart” glucometer, eliminating the need for smart phones or Wi-Fi. Diabetes coaching can be incorporated through a third-party vendor. **DELIVERY METHOD:** E HP P | | | | |

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* The company has completed the NEBGH Digital Diabetes Solutions Survey or had a phone call with an NEBGH staff member to discuss their program.

** The CDC’s Diabetes Prevention Program (DPP) is a 16-week course following an evidence-based curriculum with at least an 8-month follow-up period. The programs described as platforms to deliver the DPP are recognized by the CDC and meet these minimum qualifications.
**PRIMARY CAPABILITY: Scripted Algorithm-Driven Coaching**

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<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Engagement Indicator</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Coaching &amp; Clinicians</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alive-PD (Turnaround Health)*</td>
<td>A virtual coaching platform to deliver the CDC’s Diabetes Prevention Program.** Because there is no live coaching, Alive PD is the self-proclaimed low cost alternative for DPP.</td>
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<td><img src="image2" alt="Educational Content Icon" /> <img src="image3" alt="Personal Information Tracking Icon" /> <img src="image4" alt="Social Icon" /> <img src="image5" alt="Coaching &amp; Clinicians Icon" /></td>
<td><img src="image6" alt="Employer Icon" /> <img src="image7" alt="Health Plan Icon" /></td>
<td><img src="image8" alt="Provider Icon" /> <img src="image9" alt="Direct to Consumer Icon" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>Alme Health Coach (Next IT)</td>
<td>Artificial intelligence coach audibly communicates with a user in order to help users maintain and track healthy behaviors specific to their diabetes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lark*</td>
<td>A virtual health coach providing feedback to users based on their daily activities including diet, sleep and exercise.</td>
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**PRIMARY CAPABILITY: Device Data Download and Display**

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ambio Health*</td>
<td>A remote patient monitoring system that enables people to take health readings from home and track them in the Ambio Care Portal.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Glooko*</td>
<td>Combination mobile app and MeterSync device wirelessly transmits data from a compatible glucometer to the user’s mobile app and to the provider care management platform. Glooko’s MeterSync is compatible with over 30 glucometers on the market.</td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Engagement Icon" /> <img src="image2" alt="Educational Content Icon" /> <img src="image3" alt="Personal Information Tracking Icon" /> <img src="image4" alt="Social Icon" /> <img src="image5" alt="Coaching &amp; Clinicians Icon" /></td>
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<td>Welkin Health</td>
<td>A mobile and online platform that tracks photo journals of meals and blood sugar readings enabling your existing care team or Welkin coaches to help users with diabetes self-management.</td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Engagement Icon" /> <img src="image2" alt="Educational Content Icon" /> <img src="image4" alt="Social Icon" /> <img src="image5" alt="Coaching &amp; Clinicians Icon" /></td>
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**PRIMARY CAPABILITY: Provider-Based Care Mgmt. Platform**

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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Blue Star (WellDoc)*</td>
<td>The first mobile prescription therapy that must be prescribed by a provider. It promotes better diabetes self-management through automated context-specific responses so users can take immediate action following a blood sugar reading.</td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Engagement Icon" /> <img src="image2" alt="Educational Content Icon" /> <img src="image3" alt="Personal Information Tracking Icon" /> <img src="image4" alt="Social Icon" /> <img src="image5" alt="Coaching &amp; Clinicians Icon" /></td>
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<td>Gather Health</td>
<td>A provider-based platform for diabetes and other chronic diseases that facilitates ongoing communication for management of a user’s condition outside of the doctor’s office.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sense Health*</td>
<td>A provider-based platform for diabetes and other chronic diseases that facilitates ongoing communication for management of a user’s condition outside of the provider’s office.</td>
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<td>Tactio</td>
<td>Provider-based care management platform enabling care teams to monitor patients with diabetes and other chronic conditions and communicate with users when necessary.</td>
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### OVERVIEW

#### PRIMARY CAPABILITY: Individualized Live Coaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HealthState Diabetes Telehealth</th>
<th>Personalized Newsfeed</th>
<th>Learning Module</th>
<th>General Information</th>
<th>Diet</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Blood Sugar</th>
<th>Blood Pressure</th>
<th>Mood/Emotion</th>
<th>Meds</th>
<th>Management</th>
<th>Goal Setting and Tracking</th>
<th>Friends/Family</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Social Network</th>
<th>Competitions</th>
<th>Live</th>
<th>Algorithim/Virtual Coach</th>
<th>Existing Provider</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A digital platform connecting users to health coaches. Users track meals through a photojournal, focusing on carbohydrate consumption.</td>
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<td>Newtopia*</td>
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<td>A digital platform connecting users to health coaches referred to as “inspirators” to support healthy lifestyles and prevent metabolic syndrome. Users and “inspirators” are matched based on personality and genetic assessments. Users receive a digital scale and activity tracker.</td>
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<td>Individualized coaching and weight control plans users engage with at least one year. Users receive exercise equipment, cooking tools, activity trackers, access to a celebrity television program and more.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individualized coaching and weight-control plans users engage with for at least one year. Retrofit also offers online classes users can share with friends. Users receive and connect a wireless scale and activity trackers.</td>
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<td>Selvera*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individualized and group coaching from a registered dietitian. Selvera also offers a prepared food plan as a buy-up for individual users.</td>
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<td>Personalized programs for chronic condition management and prevention delivering individual health coaching through messaging and weekly video consultants.</td>
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**E** = Employer  **HP** = Health Plan  **P** = Provider  **DC** = Direct to Consumer

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### Scoring Methodology

The NEBGH Engagement Rating weighs each feature of a tool and solutions’ entire program and aggregates the total number of points. The points are translated into the rating icon displayed in the table to guide users in understanding how likely a tool or solutions is to foster sustained engagement with users.

* The company has completed the NEBGH Digital Diabetes Solutions Survey or had a phone call with an NEBGH staff member to discuss their program.

** The CDC’s Diabetes Prevention Program (DPP) is a 16-week course following an evidence-based curriculum with at least an 8-month follow-up period. The programs described as platforms to deliver the DPP are recognized by the CDC and meet these minimum qualifications.

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### Total possible points: 19

Mean: 8.92 points  Median: 9  Mode: 12
About NEBGH

Northeast Business Group on Health (NEBGH) is an employer-led coalition of healthcare leaders and other stakeholders that empowers its members to drive excellence in health and achieve the highest value in healthcare delivery and the consumer experience.

About NEBGH’s Solutions Center

The Solutions Center is NEBGH’s unique data-gathering and discovery platform for developing initiatives that can “move the needle” when it comes to critical healthcare issues. Focused on employers as a catalyst for change, the Solutions Center’s mission is to identify the most promising, innovative opportunities for improving health outcomes, and create a framework with the potential for transforming results and changing the national dialogue.

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The authors are solely responsible for the conduct of the research, analyses and content of the manuscript.