

## HEALTH

## “Doc, I’m off My Diet. LOL”

Mobile health care may be falling short

The promise of using text messages, video or smartphone apps to improve health care has attracted a lot of attention and dollars. Yet mobile health, also known as mHealth, is still in its infancy, and a pair of new analyses shows that it has garnered mixed results. Of 75 controlled trials in which patients used mobile technology to manage a disease or adopt healthier behaviors, only three showed reliable signs of success, according to a review article published in January in *PLOS Medicine*.

In an accompanying review, the same authors looked at the use of mobile technology to improve health care delivery, such as using text messages to remind patients about appointments, and found that 11 of 42 trials had positive results.

Physician Rahul Chakrabarti of the University of Melbourne in Australia, co-editor in chief of the *Journal of Mobile Technology in Medicine*, calls the reviews the most comprehensive meta-analysis of mHealth evidence to date.

The limitations of today’s mHealth treatments should not

discourage researchers, says epidemiologist Caroline Free of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, who led the analysis. People can learn from interventions that did work. For instance, receiving text messages helped smokers quit in one trial that verified its results with biochemical tests. In the only successful patient-intervention trial in the developing world, in Kenya, text message reminders to take anti-retroviral drugs helped to reduce HIV virus counts.

The bad news is that most trials had weak designs, with many failing to randomize participants in the control group and the experimental group. Others relied on participants to self-report the results, even though such methods can be unreliable. Most trials also neglected the developing world, where mobile phones have the most potential to improve access to health care.

Chakrabarti, who was not involved in the research, says that the studies show “there is a clear need for improved methodology.”

—Lucas Laursen



## SOCIOLOGY

## Of Lust and Lysol

Men who do more housework have less sex

Conventional wisdom suggests that women are drawn to men who help out around the house. Yet new research indicates that some divisions of labor may be sexier than others. A February paper in the *American Sociological Review* reported that married couples in which men take on a greater share of the dishes,

laundry and other traditionally female chores had sex less often than average, which in this study was about five times a month. Yet couples in which men confined themselves largely to traditionally male chores such as yard work enjoyed sex more frequently than average.

Taken to the extreme, men

who performed all the traditionally female chores would have had sex 1.6 times less often than men who did none of them. The study authors, from the Juan March Institute in Madrid and the University of Washington, arrived at the correlation by crunching data from the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), which gathered survey information from 4,500 U.S. married couples. The researchers ruled out any kind of coercion on the part of the “manly” chore-performing husbands by looking at data from the same survey on sexual satisfaction: they found that women from households with more traditional divisions of labor felt no less happy with their sex lives than women in more gender-neutral ones.

The study has its skeptics. Its data were gathered between 1992 and 1994, making demographer Sharon Sassler of Cornell University wonder about their relevance today. “In the past two decades,” she says, “who gets married has changed considerably.” Today most couples cohabit before marrying, and a large proportion of the women in those couples, Sassler argues, are not satisfied doing a disproportionate share of so-called women’s housework. According to Sassler, frequently those couples do not marry, making the set of couples who would qualify for the NSFH today profoundly different from the set in 1992.

Study co-author Julie Brines, a sociologist at the University of Washington, says men and women have deep-seated ideas about what is masculine and feminine. Displays of masculinity may evoke feminine displays in women, which activates or intensifies sexual charge. Put the man on a richer mower, in other words, and boom—fireworks. Stand him at a sudsy sink, and it’s a probable no go. —Rebecca Coffey

