

Wicked cool

As an avowed Applephile, I anxiously await the twice-yearly presentations that Apple CEO Steve Jobs makes, one in January at MacWorld in San Francisco and the other in August at a worldwide developer's conference. Jobs disappointed no one this January by unveiling the iPhone, which combines features of the legendary iPod, smartphones, and full-fledged Internet browsers.

"Wicked cool" is how *New York Times* technology guru David Pogue described the iPhone. It replaces the keyboards found on smartphones with a bigger screen that, when needed, displays an electronic keyboard for punching in phone numbers or e-mail messages. The index finger replaces the stylus, and with a flick your list of songs flies by like a slot machine, going faster with faster strokes and then slowing gradually so you can see whether to flick again. Voice mail is visual, so you can see that the last message is the one that needs to be listened to first. When you're looking at a Web page—and you see the whole page in this device—you can tap twice to click into a story or go to the next screen. It really is wicked cool.



L. Michael Posey,
BPharm, Editor,
Pharmacy Today

That phrase set my brain thinking—what would Steve Jobs do if he turned his attention to health care? What might he do with magnetic resonance imaging machines? MRIs place the patient in a claustrophobic tunnel with earplugs that will block out some of the loud, disturbing, construction-like noises that are going on all around you for the longest 20 or 30 minutes of your life. How would he improve venipuncture, colonoscopies, intubations, and all those procedures where the physician says, "You'll feel a little pressure now," just before it feels like someone has placed a Hummer on your chest?

How would third-party payers and health insurance in general be changed by someone of Jobs's ilk? Would a creative genius live with a system full of perverse incentives, ones where complications and prescription drugs are covered but OTC medications are not? Where dozens of dollars are wasted on staff time to deny a \$10 or \$12 prescription or lab test? Where poor lifestyle choices are ignored until payments start for treatment of the chronic diseases that inevitably follow?

In one part of health care, I believe people like Jobs are making a difference, despite the limitations imposed by a dysfunctional overall system. They are pharmacists who are setting up systems to link the units of chain pharmacies from coast to coast, so that when people are displaced as with Hurricane Katrina, others miles away can pull up their prescription profiles. They are pharmacists like Don Thibodeau, BPharm, described in this issue on page 28, who consults with patients and then uses software innovations to send assessments and recommendations to their physicians and dispensing pharmacists. Jobs would be proud of the efforts of the Kerr Drug pharmacists whose diabetes care services have been featured in the *New York Times*, on NBC News, and in the pages of *Today*.

Our job is not complete, though. Thousands of pharmacists are needed to provide the full range of medication therapy management services to a growing elderly population and to help middle-aged patients adopt healthy lifestyles; however, these pharmacists are currently caught up in inadequately reimbursed drug-dispensing activities (see page 42). Some pharmacists may need retraining to be fully competent in the new pharmaceutical care roles. We will need to learn to do more with technology, even things as simple as learning to use services like Apple iChat, which enables a no-cost, Internet-based videoconference among up to four people. We need to change a system where patients buy cigarettes in pharmacies—and then come back years later for treatments for their lung disease, cardiovascular complications, and cancers.

Pharmacy really is becoming wicked cool in many ways. The primary question is, Are you doing your part to create a new paradigm, a new system, a new way of thinking that succeeds despite the problems inherent in the U.S. health care system?

I hope so, and I hope you enjoy your February *Pharmacy Today*!