

How digital therapy vendors can win over doctors

Article



The news: Musculoskeletal (MSK) digital therapy vendor **Kaia Health** [published](#) a new peer reviewed clinical study showing its computer vision tech is on par with physical therapists' (PT) recommendations in suggesting exercise corrections to manage knee and hip osteoarthritis pain.

- For context, Kaia Health's [app](#) is like an at-home physical therapy app: Users access personalized therapy through Kaia Health's training [app](#), which complements virtual visits with human medical providers to reduce chronic pain like knee or back pain.
- The study evaluated 552 exercise sets among 24 participants. Its tech suggested patients modify their exercises to perform them the correct way, just as accurately as the human provider recommendations.

The trend: MSK-focused digital therapy players like Kaia Health, **Sword Health**, and **Hinge Health** have been landing contracts with employers looking to cut back on a major driver of costs for their insured members: chronic pain.

In 2020, large US employers indicated MSK conditions made up most of their healthcare spending, likely due to the [shift](#) to remote work. About **90%** of employers reported their employees' MSK conditions were the most costly to manage, **up from the 85%** of employers who said the same in 2019, [per](#) data from Business Health Group.

Employers like Salesforce and Boeing are tapping virtual MSK providers like Hinge Health, likely to prevent employee absenteeism and costs associated with reduced productivity. Hinge Health claims its tech [reduced](#) members' chronic pain by 69% and increased productivity by 61%, for instance.

What's next? Some MSK vendors are looking beyond employers and are [interested](#) in reaching more consumers via insurer partnerships—but vendors will need to prove they can engage doctors with their tech to actually get into consumers' hands.

Even if a DTx co lands in an insurance company's benefits package, they need doctors to recommend these tools to their patients. And ultimately, it's up to digital therapy developers to make it easier for doctors to prescribe DTx tools if they want to actually get into the hands of patients, [per](#) Chris Wasden, Head of Happify Health DTx.

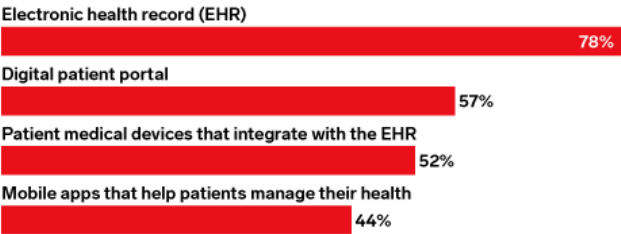
Doctors won't prescribe a digital MSK tool if it's easier to refer someone to a human physical therapist—clinical evidence will be key in getting doctors on board. Major barriers preventing docs from prescribing DTx include poor EHR integration and a lack of compelling clinical evidence: Some physicians are [wary](#) of diabetes DTx companies' clinical trial results since these studies can lack long-term followup or were based on small groups (with no control groups), for instance.

DTx vendors need to widen their clinical study sample sizes to convince doctors of the tech’s clinical value—small-scale trials do not = ROI in the eyes of doctors and insurers. For example, last year, Hinge Health conducted a longitudinal study with 10,000 patients to boast the effectiveness of its platform’s ability to reduce chronic pain, which is almost double than the number of individuals its competitors have enrolled in their studies.

To read more about what DTx vendors can do to land in doctors’ good graces, [check out our full Q&A with Happify Health’s head of DTx, Chris Wasden.](#)

Technologies that Are Important for Patient Care According to US Clinicians*, April 2021

% of respondents



Note: providers and nurses responded with 6 or 7 on a scale of 1-7 with 1 meaning "not important at all" and 7 meaning "very important"; *including physicians, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, registered nurses, and community or retail pharmacists
Source: PwC Health Research Institute, "Medical Cost Trend: Behind the Numbers 2022," June 9, 2021