

Drug firms invest more in technology

Our Bureau

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Last year has seen a 78 per cent increase in the investment made by drug companies in smart phone applications, educational Web sites and social media platforms, among others, as technology increasingly becomes the backbone in healthcare management, says consultant company Ernst and Young.

About 16 per cent of the initiatives that drug companies invested in between 2006 and 2009 were in the mobile health space. And in 2010, this segment accounted for one out of every two new initiatives, the note said.

Further, smart applications have extended beyond diabetes management tools to 14 other segments. These ranged from tools to help patients and consumers track vaccination schedules (Novartis' Vax-Trak), manage infusions for treatment of hemophilia (Bayer's Factor Track), and find cancer clinical trials within 150 miles of their location (GlaxoSmithKline's Cancer Trilas), the note said.

Also, cancer related initiatives surpassed diabetes investments in 2010, representing 15 per cent of all initiatives. Diabetes and metabolics came next, the note added.

Abbott's German language iPhone application Diabetes-Mapp to map diabetes-related

specialists and support groups near-by, and Merck's iPhone application Vree that also supported diabetes related education, tracking of blood glucose levels, nutrition etc, were just some of the initiatives undertaken by drug-majors.

Whether it has to do with educating the consumer or improving compliance, technology has added a new dimension to healthcare management leading to drug companies upping their investment in these new offerings, observed E&Y Partner, Mr Muralidharan Nair. Other drug-majors investing in technology to support healthcare management included Johnson & Johnson, Pfizer, Novartis, Sanofi-Aventis, Merck and Roche, the note pointed out.

EMERGING MARKETS

The model makes sense for emerging markets as well, the report noted, using the example of Panacea Biotec to illustrate its point. The New Delhi-based vaccine company allows consumers to share information and compare data on not just its products, but competing medicines, preventive measures and alternative therapies, the note said.

However, the investment by pharma companies is less than non-pharma companies in such innovations, the note observed.

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