DC to VC's batch of health startups: semen analysis, wearables & more

A health policy panel at DC to VC featuring Farzad Mostashari, ONC, and Nate Gross, cofounder of Doximity, among others.

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It has been a big month for health care startups. Last week, the FDA released its final guidance on smartphone applications, removing roadblocks to innovation and investment. Tomorrow, elements of President Obama's Affordable Care Act are set to take effect, which has inspired yet more invest in new software and services.

Silicon Valley's forward-thinking investors are beginning to think very seriously about health IT. The room was packed with investors at health demo days this month; the big two in the Bay Area were at the "DC to VC" conference and Rock Health, a competitive health accelerator.

One startup, Amplify Health, presented at both demo days — it's not the sexiest tech, but appears to have impressed investors and judges. Amplify has a technology for primary care physicians to manage contracts with self insured employers.

Related: Digital health funding is up, according to Rock Health's midyear report.

DC to VC, which took place in Santa Clara this afternoon, is organized by the Health 2.0 conference and Canvas, the health and IT-focused venture fund formerly known as Morganthaler Ventures. Canvas' partners were among the first to invest in health IT; partner Rebecca Lynn and executive-in-residence Missy Krasner have built up a strong reputation in the space.

"Last year we had more angel investors in the room then institutional investors for DC to VC," said Krasner. "This year it was reverse, we had more institutional investors (including venture capitalists) in the room than angels."

Eight finalists were chosen to present onstage, selected from over 100 applicants. The two categories were consumer (tech for patients) and enterprise, meaning software intended for hospitals, doctors, and payers. The judges included a mix of investors and policy experts from the Health and Human Services (HHS) and other agencies.

The special guest was Dr. Farzad Mostashari, the recently departed head of the ONC, a Washington D.C.-based agency tasked with promoting the adoption of electronic health records.

Any health IT trends?

On reviewing the finalists (see below), I spotted a few overlapping themes. Software that helps employers navigate the new health care reforms is hot.

Likewise, the buzz around "personalized medicine" is fueling some interesting ideas. Entrepreneurs are building algorithmic-based technology for doctors to compile data, and prescribe more targeted treatments for disease.

The buzziest buzz word of them all? Wearables. Omsignal is particularly interesting, as it offers patients an alternative to clunky smartwatches and remote patient monitoring devices. The company has developed a line of digital sensing clothing for consumers to track various body metrics.

The finalists:

- Amplify Health; software to help primary care groups contract with self-insured employers;
- Benefitter; employer solutions for navigating the Affordable Care Act;

- Qualaris Healthcare Solutions; a suite of software solutions to help healthcare organizations improve clinical practices to make safe care easier;
- Daisy Bill, a software as a service-based revenue cycle management tool for providers to manage workers' compensation medical bills;
- Omsignal, a line of bio-sensing clothing (designed for everyday wear) that connect seamlessly with mobile devices;
- Kinsa's first product is a low-cost smartphone-connected thermometer. It allows us to communicate with people who have just fallen ill;
- Medwhat, a personal medical assistant app providing automatic personalized answers to your health and medical questions;
- Sandstone Diagnostics, a biotech company that has developed Trak, a consumer semen analysis platform for men managing fertility issues.

The winners:

Amplify Health for the enterprise category

Based in San Francisco, Amplify Health enables primary care physicians to reduce avoidable healthcare costs. Their suite of products allow primary care groups to directly contract with self- insured employers, proactively manage patient populations, and perform data analytics that reduce total healthcare spend.

Kinsa for the consumer category

Headquartered in New York City, Kinsa is creating the world's first real-time map of human health. With it, they empower society with information to track and stop the spread of disease, and simultaneously transform the way people care for their children, families and communities. Their first product is an ultra-low-cost smartphone-connected thermometer.

The two winners received a prize of $10,000 in cash.