

NGPX 2023

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## Mayo Clinic Assists At-Home Patients With Voice-Powered Chat

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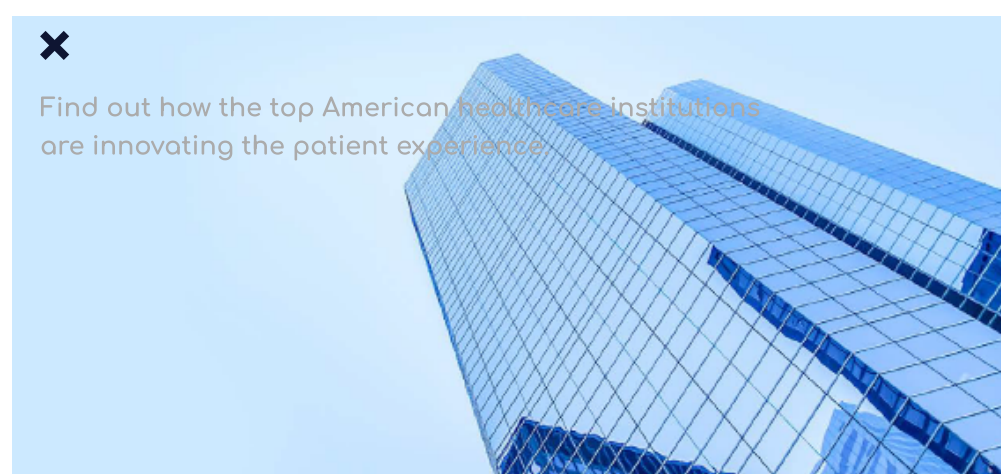
Hospitals and healthcare systems are increasingly seeking to incorporate voice assistants - such as Amazon's Alexa and Apple's Siri - into patient care delivery. Until recently, voice-enabled technology was still something of a novelty in healthcare environments, used primarily for simple applications, such as enabling patients to order lunch to their hospital rooms. But, as the technology advances and more startups develop voice software solutions for the healthcare industry, 2019 is looking more and more like the year when voice assistants will become more deeply embedded into the care delivery process.

Now, [Mayo Clinic](#) is looking to expand its presence on voice assistants and has teamed up with conversational AI technology provider [Orbita](#) to publish a Google Assistant action, as well as a voice-interactive web-based chatbot.

### Google Assistant, Alexa, and Voice-Powered Web Chat

Voice isn't an entirely new area for Mayo Clinic. The organization first launched a first aid application on Amazon Alexa devices in 2017 - the [Mayo First-Aid Alexa skill](#) - which won 2019 Best of Show Bronze Award, the 2019 Best Third-Party Tool Award, as well as the 2019 Alexa skill of the Year for Healthcare Award at the [Alexa Conference](#) in January 2019. The skill provides information on first aid topics, including care instructions for handling a baby's fever, treating a burn, or performing CPR.

Now, Mayo Clinic is expanding that content to Google Assistant-enabled devices and an AI-powered voice chatbot with the objective of exploring how voice technology could be further used as a diagnostic tool and a tool for helping patients adhere to post-discharge instructions.



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trusted health information where and when they need it," [said](#) General Internal Medicine Physician and Associate Medical Director of Mayo Clinic Global Business Solutions [Sandhya Pruthi, M.D.](#) "We're pleased to continue innovating with voice and exploring its value to enhance patient and consumer engagement."

Users of the [Mayo First Aid Google Assistant action](#) access the content by saying, "Hey Google, talk to Mayo First Aid", after which, they will be prompted to ask their question. The same content and experience is also available via a voice-interactive chatbot at the Mayo Clinic website [Symptoms](#) and [Diseases and Conditions](#) pages on web and mobile browsers that support voice input. The new voice-powered chatbot allows patients to get access to the key medical information they need from Mayo's website faster and with greater convenience than if they were to perform a typed search. As [Jay Maxwell](#), Senior Director of Health Information at Mayo Clinic, [points out](#), "From a healthcare perspective, voice offers capabilities that we may not otherwise have. For instance, speaking is three times faster than typing or texting."

Unlike most of today's chatbots, which are only keyboard driven, the new voice-based chat experience is quicker and easier, which may be crucial if users need information on how to respond in an emergency situation - for example, if a user needs to know the steps for CPR. (Importantly, in such life-threatening circumstances, all of Mayo Clinic's voice assistants will repeat multiple times that the user should call 911, though will provide instructions on how to perform the CPR procedure.)

## Meeting Patients Where They Are

The platform used to launch the new voice application is Orbita Voice, which was initially brought to market last year by Boston-based Orbita. The Orbita Voice platform is unique because it focuses on developing voice solutions specifically for healthcare providers, and the company says it is the only HIPAA-compliant platform for voice and chatbot applications in the industry. Incorporating more than 50 medical topics for patients with low-acuity problems, such as minor burns or spider bites, the platform enables patients to get fast, hands-free answers to critical first aid questions.

For Pruthi, the use of voice technology enables Mayo Clinic to meet patients where they are. "People will still go to print, mobile, and digital content on the website to get health information, but they will also be looking to get health information through voice," she said. "We wanted to provide accurate, trusted, evidence-based health content to address consumers' health concerns when they have them and when they need the information."

## Final Thoughts

Over a quarter (26.2%) of US Adults now own a smart speaker, according to a [recent report](#) from Voicebot.ai, and by 2020, [forecasts suggest](#) that almost 30% of web searches will be conducted without a screen. Given that [80% of internet users](#) say they have searched for health-related topics online, it certainly makes sense for healthcare organizations like Mayo Clinic to provide voice-activated first aid and symptom checker solutions to help patients find the trusted clinical information they need quickly.

But Mayo Clinic believes there is even greater potential with the technology - namely, leveraging voice analytics to detect diseases. This is something Mayo Clinic researchers are actively working on. "There are diagnostic clues hidden in our voice that could serve as a diagnostic aid," said Maxwell, citing a [2018 Mayo Clinic study](#) which found that voice signal characteristics are independently associated with the presence of coronary heart disease. Mayo Clinic also noted that changes in voice tone or cadence could potentially be predictive of high blood pressure, stroke, or heart attack. AI-powered voice analytics could be used to detect such issues, which would be particularly beneficial for diagnosing conditions remotely through telemedicine programs.

For Pruthi, Mayo Clinic's first aid voice assistants are just the start of what's to come. In the future, she says, biometric data collected from patients through wearables, smart speakers, and other apparatus will trigger voice-enabled devices to alert patients to potential problems, or even remind them to take their medication.

Voice technology, says Pruthi, provides another tool for patients to interact with their providers, and will be a significant contributor in the drive to make healthcare more personalized and consumer centric. "We need more high touch, more interaction, and more engagement with the patient," Pruthi said. "We need to be more proactive in how we deliver care to improve the patient experience."

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