**Intro to UX**

**What *exactly* is User Experience?**

At its most basic, User Experience (UX) refers to how a person responds to, and feels about using a specific object, system, service, or product, such as a computer application or website. Encompassing a user’s perceptions, attitudes, thoughts, emotions, and physical surroundings when interacting with a system or product, UX is simply the accumulation of a user’s experiences while engaging a system or product in a given environment.

With that in mind, it naturally follows that a *good* user experience generally means the user is satisfied and pleased after using a certain system or product, finding it accessible, effective, reliable, and even advantageous. On the flip side, a *bad* user experience signifies that the system or product in use may be difficult, frustrating, unreliable, or inefficient.

Because it contemplates the mosaic of human experience as it relates to user and system interaction, UX is a complex concept, an involved process, interdisciplinary in nature, and rife with jargon. When you drill down to the center of it, though, UX is essentially about humans using objects in different settings—an examination of human nature, situation, and object when evaluating the exchanges between the three.

**UX Practices and Health Information Technology**

If UX, at its conceptual core, is the process of understanding users—their abilities, dislikes, values, and work contexts—and improving how users interface with systems and products, then UX practices are the activities centered around evaluating and, ultimately, improving user experience.

When considering UX as it relates to Health Information Technology (HIT), it is essential to remember HIT’s topmost goal: Improving patient care.

Emphasizing patient requirements and quality health care when analyzing system or product reliability is fundamental to implementing UX best practices in HIT. If the system or product doesn’t adequately support the provider and boost patient care, then it is safe to say that it needs work.

When developing and advancing HIT, safety, credibility, and usefulness are integral criteria for UX. On the hectic front lines of patient care, systems and products that are dependable, straightforward, and secure are unquestionable necessities. Providers and clinicians heavily rely on HIT systems, often utilizing them as decision-making aids during demanding and challenging circumstances.

Split second decisions regarding a patient’s health and wellbeing are easier to make when users are comfortable with, and trust the systems and products they are using. This fact alone underscores UX an essential component to HIT development.

**Usability vs UX**

Surrounding UX is a swarm of lingo and terminology that often clouds the true meaning of both UX, and the language used to describe and interpret it. Usability is a term extensively used in place of, or in conjunction with UX. While usability is an intrinsic part of UX, usability and UX are not one in the same.

In plain language, usability is the ability to get achieve goals or reach outcomes without complication and irritation. When considering usability in the context of UX, it refers to the ability to use a specific system or tool with effectiveness, satisfaction, and precision. Usability is a measurement of how well a system or device functions when engaged by a user. Dr. Jiajie Zhang, a distinguished professor at the University of Texas Health Center, defines usability as a measure of how “useful, usable, and satisfying” a user finds a particular system.

While usability focuses solely on the interaction between user and system, UX examines the entire context of user and system engagement, including user emotions, physical environments, and organizational or business culture.

Usability concentrates on user and tool, whereas UX analyzes the complete human experience that envelops user and tool interaction. In this context, usability is a part of UX—a major characteristic or principle in the UX process.

**Human Centered Design and UX**

Another prevalent term used in the UX universe is human centered design (HCD). By definition, human centered design is an approach to problem solving and design that incorporates human perspectives and reactions in every step of solving a problem or designing a solution. A philosophy and practice geared towards understanding the core needs of the user, HCD strives to continuously integrate human attitudes and viewpoints into the development of systems, products, and services. HCD’s goal is sustained quality improvement of both the problem-solving process and the designed solution.

While UX is ultimately an analyzing process, a cycle of discovery and evaluation, Human centered design is a discipline that uses UX principles, such as usability, in developing and designing systems, applications, and tools. Human centered designers keep both the user and context of use front and center during all design stages, using user feedback and the iterative process (cycling through multiple versions based on discussion and user comments, each better than the one before) to refine their work.

Employing UX in design solutions, developers and designers consider visual appeal, ease of use, accessibility, credibility, and dependability. Again, credible, dependable, and safe systems are especially important in the world of HIT, stressing the important role human centered design plays in providing excellent health care.

**More details to follow**

This is just a quick introduction to UX and its role in HIT, there is more about the UX Process elsewhere in the guide.