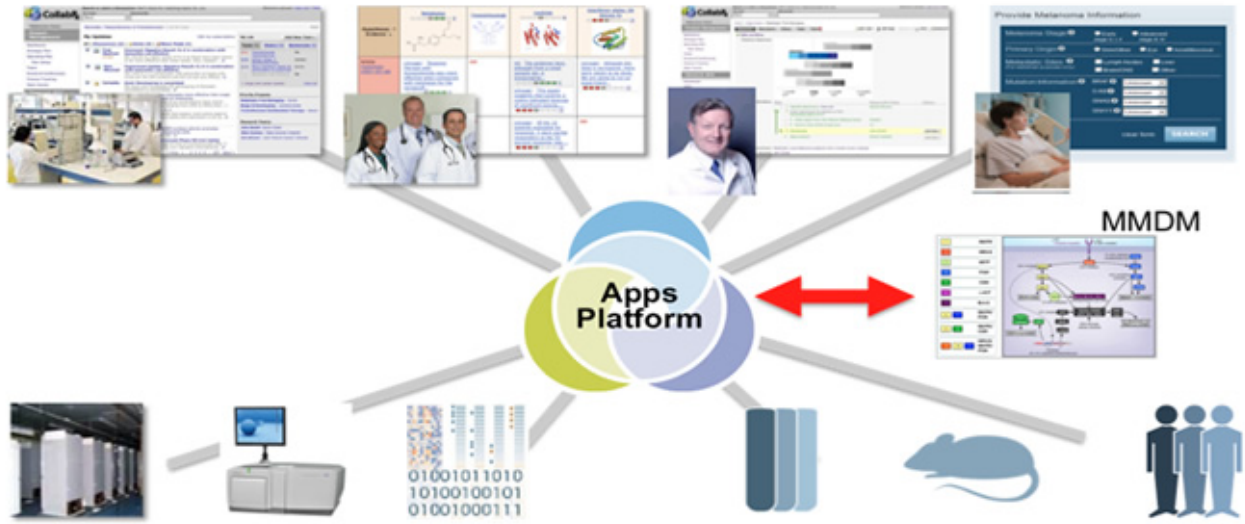
Web app taps the medical crowds for personalized cancer treatment



One of the greatest challenges for cancer patients is determining the best treatment option for their particular instance of the disease. That's made especially complex by the sheer number of experiments and trials going on at any given time, and the difficulty of zeroing in on the most promising ones for a particular individual. Cancer Commons hopes to make that process easier through a web application that taps the wisdom of the medical crowds to help doctors and patients find the best personalized solution.

California-based Cancer Commons was founded by a cancer survivor who believes he would not have found the experimental therapies that saved him if not for personal connections at the US National Cancer Institute, according to a CBC News report. Accordingly, the free “open science” initiative hopes to help others succeed as well by creating new ways of finding individually tailored cancer information online. Beginning with melanoma, Cancer Commons is being developed one cancer at a time in partnership with leading professional and patient advocacy organizations, pharmaceutical companies, medical centers, and health informatics companies.

At the core of each resulting “commons” is a curated Molecular Disease Model (MDM) that lists the known molecular subtypes of that cancer and then links to the relevant pathways, diagnostic tests, approved and experimental (targeted) therapies, and clinical trials. Doctors and patients can input key factors and variables about the particular instance they're fighting, and the MDM will match those factors with the treatments that have been most successful so far. Clinicians and researchers, meanwhile, can post peer-reviewed clinical observations and data that may be too early for formal presentation but may still be useful for late-stage patients, for example, while physicians and patients can report outcomes and side effects. Ultimately, the site hopes to provide patients with “personalized, actionable information that can save lives, while providing the life sciences industry with a game changing infrastructure that will slash the time and cost of developing new drugs and diagnostics and getting them to patients".

Cancer Commons is now working on standardizing the process by which its Molecular Disease Models are collaboratively created, and plans to apply it over the next year to other common cancers. While the site is free for doctors and patients to use, its revenue model focuses on pharmaceutical industry sponsorships. Medical and pharmaceutical entrepreneurs: one to get involved in? (Related: Health care by monthly membership — Global directory lets medical tourists find & review clinics — Online shopping for medical services.)

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Spotted by: R.P.