Big Brother & Breathing

Privacy vs. asthma relief

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Many doctors are excited about the new crop of high-tech asthma inhalers. These devices allow health care professionals to track each time the device is used—down to the very location where a person might be having an attack.

This is possible because the inhalers use GPS systems to record when and where inhalers are used. They also include mobile logging applications that allow patients to manually enter asthma data, and early warning software—such as that found in the Asthmapolis inhaler—that can alert patients to potential asthma attacks based on allergens and pollutants in the environment.

Similarly, the Asthmapolis "community trends" function allows parents to learn about areas in their communities where asthma symptoms occur most often and what the common triggers are in those locations.

The Asthmapolis also allows parents to track how often children take their controller meds and use their rescue inhaler. Parents can then share this data with their child's doctor, thus providing an accurate picture to the physician of their child's own unique asthma symptoms.

Another handheld device, the Wheezometer, from iSonea and Qualcomm Life, measures wheezing, a major symptom of asthma. When the device is turned on and placed on the base of the throat, it evaluates and records an asthma sufferer's breathing for 30 seconds. Afterward, the Wheezometer gives a readout telling what percent of the person's breathing time is spent wheezing. This is important because increased wheezing can signal an impending asthma attack.