

# Identifying Personal Strengths to Help Patients Manage Chronic Illness

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### What was the research about?

Most health care focuses on what is wrong with people. In this study, the research team focused instead on people's strengths. The team wanted to identify the personal strengths that patients might find helpful in managing chronic illness or improving health habits. To that end, the team created a computer app to help patients recognize personal strengths they can draw on. Then, the team tried to identify times when bringing patient strengths into health care might help patients.

### What were the results?

Patients in the study reported 30 personal strengths that might be helpful in managing illness or improving health habits. The strengths fit into three groups:

- Personal traits, such as having a positive attitude
- Relationships, such as having family or friends who support the patient
- Access to community resources, such as knowing where to go for help with a health problem

A design team of patients, caregivers, and healthcare professionals worked with the research team to create an app called Strengths Collector. The app shows four videos of patients talking about knowing their strengths. In the app, users pick their strengths from a list and rate how important each strength is for a visit to their doctor. Strengths then appear on the app in order of importance for that visit. Patients and doctors can discuss this list to plan care.

The design team also identified situations when bringing strengths into health care might be helpful for patients. Examples include

- Managing diabetes
- Managing ongoing pain
- When patients have to use health care often

### Who was in the study?

The research team gathered information from 76 patients with chronic illnesses. Of these patients, 41 were African American, 20 were white, 1 was Asian, 1 was multi-race, and 13 were unknown race. All patients were from Cleveland, Ohio.

### What did the research team do?

To create a list of strengths that might help patients manage illnesses, the research team met with 76 patients and healthcare professionals. Then, the team invited 19 patients, caregivers, and healthcare professionals to form a design team. The design team worked with computer programmers to create the app and identify when doctors and patients can use patient strengths in health care.

### What were the limits of the study?

The study only tested the app with small numbers of patients. The team also wasn't able to test if using patient strengths improved patient health.

Future research could look at whether patients and clinicians can use the app in real-world visits and

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whether strengths-based care improves patient health.

### **How can people use the results?**

Healthcare professionals and patients can use the list of strengths to think about ways to help patients

better manage illness or improve health habits. Patients can use the app to find their strengths to help plan care with their doctors.

*To learn more about this project, visit [pcori.org/Stange081](http://pcori.org/Stange081).*