

A vision for digital health at the Healthcare Innovation Summit Africa 2017

By Nivashini Narsiah

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We live in an unprecedented era of technological innovation. Digital breakthroughs are empowering healthcare organisations to improve labour productivity, clinical outcomes and human experience. How we adapt technology to the people who use it - patients, health insurers and providers - is going to define the future of health.



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AI's widening ambit

Among the factors set to remake the digital healthcare ecosystem is Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI is changing from a back-end tool for healthcare organisations to being at the forefront of both consumer and clinician experience. AI-powered technologies can suggest relevant options based on user behaviour as well as guide patients and doctors toward optimal outcomes.

Data curation and orchestration also fall within AI's widening ambit, meaning that AI will partner increasingly with clinicians, helping to support diagnoses without substituting for clinical judgement. By equipping healthcare providers with information at speed, the use of AI will come to mean that more time can be spent on activities that add value to patient experience – human-human interactions machines cannot replace.

Human-focused tech

To this point, the deployment of tech within the healthcare space necessitates a human-centric approach. Designing technology to account for human experience benefits consumers, clinicians and administrators.

Moreover, technology's increasing abilities mean that healthcare organisations have an unprecedented opportunity to transform their relationships with all stakeholders. Human-focused tech also provides consumers with a better opportunity to access care and information in a way and at a time that they want to.

Plug into and play within the broader ecosystem

Critically, the currently fragmented healthcare players will need to find ways to work together to meet rising expectations within this new technology-enabled ecosystem. Historically, healthcare service providers including hospitals, pharmacies and insurers focused purely on the functions within their control. Now, these players are beginning to understand the ways in which they depend on and will need to work with others who provide patient care either before or after they do.

For healthcare enterprises, integrating core functions with digital platforms is set to make it easier to plug into and play within the broader ecosystem. Collaboration between players also has the potential to improve clinical outcomes, lower costs, improve market share and maximise productivity.

Healthcare is the sum of many parts, including systems that pay for, coordinate and deliver care. There are also systems that help people self-manage a lifestyle goal or specific medical condition. Platforms can provide the connected

infrastructure that enables service providers and consumers to exchange the necessary value and data.

To enable their future business ecosystems, healthcare enterprises will need to develop a robust portfolio of digital partners. The healthcare ecosystem of the future is complex, set to extend beyond technology, connecting the capabilities, expertise and services that affect healthcare organisations, consumers and clinicians.

Many healthcare organisations have already begun to integrate their core business functionalities with third parties and their platforms. In order to deliver optimal patient outcomes in a changing world, healthcare leaders will need to leverage these relationships and tools intelligently.

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