Healthcare innovation in 2021 and beyond

By Reynhardt Uys

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In a fast moving, high demand environment like healthcare services, keeping up with digital transformation can be overwhelming and thanks to the acceleration Covid-19 has created, adapting to the digital era requires a much faster shift towards a flexible and risk-taking mindset.

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This, of course means letting go of outdated processes and trusting that disruption will deliver big results.

In a recent survey, it was revealed that only 7% of healthcare and pharmaceutical companies said they had gone digital – compared to a somewhat larger 15% of companies in other industries. Despite these figures and the current pandemic - the global healthcare market is expected to cross the $2ttrn mark in 2020.

Proving that not even Brexit, a pandemic or a US election will slow the accelerated growth of this crucial industry.

Let's take a closer look at what has been inspiring the healthcare industry in its path toward a more digitally inclusive and enabled future, post-Covid and beyond.

The rise of on-demand healthcare services

Consumers are increasingly becoming more tech savvy as the need to practice social distancing requires a more digitally-reliant future. From basic services and access to information – the need to have on-demand health and care services is rising.

Patients are looking to primary care clinicians to invest in the tech needed in order to deliver on their services when they need it and at quality, including virtual consultations, health monitoring and data storage.

Simply put, we are becoming more mobile with more than 50% of all web browsing in the world occurring on mobile devices. From heart rate and oxygen monitoring, to exercise and general heath apps, there are many devices on the market that are available to aid in our efforts to become more aware of our health, monitor any possible conditions, prescription renewals and screenings, just to name a few.

Big data in healthcare

The importance of big data in healthcare lies in the immediate need to lower the rate of medication error, emergency care triage, facilitating preventative care and for more accurate staffing.

Big data can solve many of the challenges within the industry where many channels of communication and data storage all funnel towards the organisation.

When magnifying one portion of the industry – it's easy to see where possible challenges lie. For example, when taking a closer look at pharmaceuticals – big data can play a pivotal role in product iteration and product budgets by studying customer personas from accurate patient data.

A virtual consulting room

If someone had told us 10 years ago, that you could quite easily screen a patient using a smart watch device, or that you could quite easily conduct a primary healthcare consultation using video calling technology – you'd probably think we were crazy.

With the modern advancements of technology and pioneers in the healthcare industry – virtual consultations are not only possible, but are now increasingly becoming preferred.

Particularly in the emergency care space to aid in triage management and flow of patients into casualty, but also where non-life threatening cases can be attended to quickly and without the need to risk exposure to the Covid virus.

We are now seeing first response activations for healthcare patients to quickly access a broadband connected device to point them in the right direction, while also continuing to keep their health and safety a priority.

Primary care and casualty triage management are not the only aspects of the industry benefiting from a virtual front door – emergency SOS and first responders are also seeing benefits in this solution as well as they are able to react to life-threatening situations far quicker than in real time prior to the great digital acceleration.

Wearable medical devices

Previously, medical grade stainless steel bracelets where the only form of communication with a non-responsive patient in an emergency situation. Now nearly all wearable devices can connect to an emergency response app almost immediately based on the patient's health status and treatment needs. On connecting or alerting emergency response – you're able to provide your health records and emergency contact persons information at the scene to accelerate and better your chances of treatment and recovery.

More health organisations are looking to human-centred experience design experts to help them solve many patient

challenges including the best possible way to communicate through these devices and to get access to the information and the action they need, when they need it most.

By removing non-essential elements within the patient journey – we're able to create an experience that not only saves lives, but improves them as well.

Human-centred design for digital literacy

A digital future comes with as many challenges as it does solutions. Digital literacy being placed quite high up on that list. How do we design one solution that not only works for the savvy starter, but also for those in care homes and retirement villages who may not have had the same exposure to these devices.

When looking for solutions, it is crucial to understand your user; their challenges, access to devices and their level of digital literacy. Only when we truly walk in the shoes of our users, can we then design a solution that will work for them.

When considering even the most simple of journeys, for example finding the right contact information for an emergency – to some, the logical order may be to search within the menu – whereas to others, it may be a large static button placed at the bottom of every screen, nearest to the right thumb.

How do we know where to place this emergency contact information?

Through human-centred design.

AI – a good friend of HCD

Human-centred design experts are advocates of your users. In any situation, journey or brand – the expert will place your user at the centre. How do they think? What are their habits? What do they need? What do they want?

These experts will spend hours understanding your real users and what the solution should look like.

With this in mind – the experts will explore ways of communicating with your users long after the experience. This includes maintaining contact with them, throughout their lifetime or the length of time they need you.

This means exploring AI – because after all – we are human, and cannot service or respond to thousands if not millions all at once.

AI can serve to close a communication or screening gap in healthcare. It provides an immediate response or set of actions for the user to follow in order to seek help, guidance or even treatment. It can serve as a conduit of data between patient and clinician.

But it is important to note the positive change digital is creating for the industry, by improving response rate, accuracy in prescription distribution, improving triage management within casualty and emergency response units as well as the monitoring of health status and chronic illnesses. From the smart watch to home automation technology – we're seeing the healthcare industry come into its own within its role in improving and sustaining the human race.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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