

Global health challenges and how to change them

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The challenges before the global healthcare sector are plenty. But so are the opportunities. As healthcare sector stakeholders prepare their road map for the future, it is important for them to have a panoramic view of what's working and what's not, what's redundant and what's hot in their circles.



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1. Financial operations and performance improvement

Many of the world's health systems are struggling financially due to an increasing number of people with chronic illnesses; expensive infrastructure and medical technology; rising labor costs and staff shortages; and other factors.

To address this challenge, some healthcare stakeholders are implementing payment reforms, such as introducing value-based payment models that help providers, payers, and patients achieve the best outcomes at the lowest cost. Technology-enabled patient engagement strategies are also helping people interact with their healthcare ecosystem and take care of themselves at lower costs. Many countries have adopted universal health coverage to provide basic healthcare services to people. Governments are focusing on preventative health and improved cost-efficiency through programmes such as pricing controls on pharmaceuticals and medical technology devices. Population health management (PHM) is being used to identify people's health care needs and offer services accordingly.

In addition to adopting these approaches, healthcare stakeholders are also incorporating automated systems, building new revenue streams, and demonstrating readiness to work with new partners such as digital-first health solution disruptors.

2. Care model innovation

No longer passive participants in their healthcare, consumers are demanding transparency, convenience, access, and personalised products and services - similar to other aspects of their lives. It is, therefore, important for health systems to morph their strategies accordingly.

Some health systems are doing this by transitioning certain inpatient procedures from inside hospital walls to less acute outpatient settings such as ambulatory care centers, retail clinics, community health centers, and even people's homes. Some others are using virtual health - connecting clinicians with patients (and with other clinicians and stakeholders) through telecommunication and networked technologies - to remotely deliver healthcare services and support well-being.

For better consumer-centric services, health systems can also look at removing operational barriers, linking digital offerings to a strategically segmented customer experience, and investing in core analytics to create a 360-degree view of the consumer.

3. Digital transformation and interoperability

Organisations that continue to look at digital transformation as a mere buzzword run the risk of being reduced to “also-rans” in the race. It's here to stay and slated to lay the foundation for new care delivery models; shape a predictive, preventive, and personalised future; promote closer collaboration among sector stakeholders; and drive cheaper, more precise, and less invasive treatments and therapies.

Technologies such as cloud computing, 5G technology, artificial intelligence (AI), natural language processing (NLP), and the internet of medical things (IoMT) can help deliver health care services in ways that consumers prefer to receive them. Of particular interest is the use of data as a platform (DaaP) to extract insights from patient data, which can support a number of opportunity areas.

Apart from the challenges posed by antiquated legacy platforms, the cost and complexity of new technologies, and constantly evolving business needs and scenarios, health systems have the issue of cybersecurity to grapple with. As virtual health care increases in capability and popularity, organisations will likely need to continue investing in security tools and services to identify risks and keep them at bay.

4. Future of work

Technologies and business models change. So do people and their job priorities. Health systems need to consider new methods to source, hire, train, and retain skilled workers to achieve their overall objective.

Some healthcare organisations are using improved working conditions, alternative employment models (virtual, gig/contract), and innovative technologies to anchor cost-effective, next-generation talent models. Many countries are trying to offset workforce shortages by providing incentives to attract foreign talent or to encourage health care professionals to work in remote regions.

Healthcare organisations can also look at making smart investments in workforce and technology, especially in areas

such as virtual health, consumer engagement, interoperability and analytics, and talent; recruiting from other sectors to bring new ideas and outside-the-box thinking to their organisations; and training employees in trending technologies such as AI-enabled robotic process automation (RPA) and cognitive intelligence.

Health systems need to work toward a future in which the collective focus shifts away from a system of sick care - treating patients after they fall ill - to one of health, which supports physical and mental well-being, prevention, and early intervention. Looking at factors unrelated to the medical system and nudging people to proactively manage their health and well-being through initiatives such as smart health communities (SHCs) is just one way to go about it, although there are challenges there as well.

It is, therefore, important for all stakeholders to understand, analyse, and respond to these trends and issues.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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