

“HEALTHCARE” – YOU NEED TO “CARE”!

Over the years, we have seen the evolution of healthcare. In 2017, I wrote a draft on healthcare into the future, which I did not publish. Now three years after, with COVID-19 persisting, flipped through the notes, and realized that some of the points I noted down were much applicable and true to our situation today.

At that instance, my expectation of the evolving situation was focused on the consumerism of healthcare; the direction consumers of healthcare are changing the care delivery model. A key reason for this change was digital technology. The anticipation then was:

- The connected and empowered patient will have more information at his or her fingertips than had ever been possible before.
- Patients will be moving toward highly curated, personalized, and humanized online experiences to ensure they are getting the right information from knowledgeable and trusted sources, not just anyone with a keyboard.
- Providers and especially doctors and other healthcare professionals will benefit from interacting with connected patients.
- Empowered patients would share and discuss with their doctors on their symptoms and treatment plan.
- Social networks will change the way information is classified and shared. Enabling the consumers of healthcare to connect and share with interest groups on any given

disease or preventive medicine.

- Personalized medicine will be gaining more traction. Individuals expectation would be to look for just the right information, personalized to their situation.
- Digital technologies such as messaging, chatbot, screen sharing and video will help with

easily utilized visualized data, and frequent interactions that shall provide patients with just the right information when they really need it.

- Patients will want to engage with the same healthcare professionals for the benefit of a continuous evidence-based medicine practice that shall balance the practical with the personable.



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- Healthcare shall evolve to be more borderless for the global community. Millions of healthcare consumers would transit boundaries to seek better healthcare, which means good expertise, facilities, and lower costs.
- Healthcare providers such as the hospitals, pharmaceuticals, physicians, and payers shall by embracing technologies have significant prospects enabling scalable, personal interactions for both individual and group basis.
- Advanced analytics shall gain momentum for patient insights, trends, and solutions. Data shall take the lead in delivering measurable health outcomes and value-based care.

Now, how has the coronavirus accelerated the trending changes and more?

It has accelerated spending on healthcare globally. The double-digit growth year after year for healthcare was already an unattainable situation that was begging for a solution. Although the main contentious issue for healthcare has been the increasing, unsustainable cost, COVID-19 scare did not spare anyone from spending much more to contain the spread of the coronavirus. Countries injected billions of dollars to contain the impact of the coronavirus and the economy. And the after-effect of the financial situation and the solutions are still in a work-in-progress stage.

I can confidently acknowledge that individual awareness on the importance of personal health has been raised globally to another

level. Thus, the post-COVID-19 situation presents a prospect for policy changes and shifts to address significant steps towards a holistic approach that is prevention and wellness focus. Prevention is critical to mitigate the healthcare challenges we confront in this era of a pandemic and beyond. The attention should be diverted to primary care, providing personalized programs, value-based care models and outcome measurement. We should build on the awareness already strengthened by the pandemic to reflect and educate the population towards their responsibility towards managing their health. By taking charge of one's health, the individual has already won the battle to face subsequent challenges, whether it is physical or behavioural.

More needs are required in mental health care in improving patient outcomes. Studies have shown that individuals with mental health conditions have a higher frequency of having chronic physical conditions (co-morbidities) than individuals without mental health conditions. They also impact on the total cost of health care. The post-COVID-19 period shall exacerbate existing mental health conditions and add more onsets of new conditions that could increase the expenditure on health services. Mental health has already been trending to be an essential health priority. We need a refreshing policy for behavioural health from a holistic angle, incorporating the need for more financial commitment, establishing it as a vital health issue as physical health, that needs the attention from the payers, providers, and the government.

Leverage on data, analytics, and technology. Post-COVID-19, we are capturing more data, in providing teleconsultations, home care, and application to monitor the health status of individuals in the community. Isn't this an opportune time to ride on with advanced analytics and have tools to identify populations who would benefit from targeted prevention and treatment efforts? Clinical resources can then be directed to those most at risk and unmet basic needs. We already have an excellent primary care network from both the public and private sectors in Malaysia. This would be an ideal platform for this transformation, and to build on a national healthcare financing scheme.

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