

Five questions about the future of healthcare and technology

Healthcare technology innovation and adoption has no doubt accelerated in 2020. We've seen unprecedented acceleration as a direct result of COVID-19. And while the growing trend is encouraging, it also begs the question of what challenges and changes are on the horizon.

MNP's John Muffolini sought these answers during a panel discussion with Ella Seitz, Principal at Esplanade HealthTech Ventures, and Samer Abughannam, CEO of Layla Care at Association for Corporate Growth's 2020 Capital Connection Conference.

Below is a summary of their conversation.

How has digital healthcare changed from the start of COVID-19?

Ella says the rapid adoption of virtual care and a spike in investor interest has caused digital healthcare to evolve more in 2020 than it has in the past 10 years.

Samer agrees, saying it's also opened the door to future advances. The pandemic has catalyzed a desire for innovation, and he finds it hard to imagine anyone will want to move back to the way things were.

How will virtual care continue to evolve?

Samer says the dialog is shifting to a more user-focused lens. He believes the framing of virtual care will fixate less around features and functions and increasingly on the benefits to underserved communities in addressing patient needs and delivering value for end users.

Likewise, Ella sees similarities between virtual care now and the early days of e-commerce. She believes we're headed toward an integrated, omnichannel digital health system which seamlessly balances physical and online experiences.

What are the biggest challenges to digital health adoption in North America?

Ella worries the lack of reimbursement appetite for virtual care and digital health technology may leave Canadians behind as other countries continue to modernize. She's also concerned this creates barrier to innovation which will prevent those who need healthcare most from accessing it.

Samer similarly worries whether institutional friction will hamper wide scale adoption. He sees challenges in implementing more sophisticated systems until someone first steps up to addressing basic digitization issues like paper charting in many jurisdictions.

What are some emerging trends in digital health?

Samer sees a real opportunity for technologies to streamline clinical processes and flatten the rising cost / demand curve. He points to advances in AI which can help remove administrative barriers and support care providers' decision making.

Alternatively, Ella sees an immediate opportunity to fill the gaps in information sharing. She sees the long-term potential of AI, machine learning, and Internet of Things applications — but says it's difficult to expect imminent widespread adoption in a system that still relies on fax machines. However, COVID and consumer appetite are very strong catalysts.

How can the investor community add value to digital healthcare?

Ella says there are some great ideas in market, but also a lot of bold promises. She believes investors can help to determine the good from the bad and put the right structures in place to assist in the success of the most promising digital health offerings.

Samer also feels the market is overdue for consolidation. Investors can add value by orchestrating key mergers and putting strong governance and leadership teams in place. He also cautions on the need to move slowly and cautiously given that people's health and private data are central to the industry.

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