

Digital health meets radical interoperability: the future of consumer experience

Today's health care consumer demands a seamless, end-to-end, consumer-centered, digital experience. To meet those demands, both health plans and health care providers are trending towards an increased reliance on digital health solutions powered by interoperability. Is your organization taking the appropriate steps to enhance your digital health capabilities and enable radical interoperability?

Connecting the digital dots (with interoperability)

In today's health care landscape, digital health is becoming increasingly important for providers, plans, and consumers alike. The continued need to improve health system performance, physician shortages, and shifting customer preferences are just a few of the pressures driving the health ecosystem towards digital solutions. In addition to the above challenges, the growing world population brings to the forefront other pertinent considerations such as overpopulation, diminishing access to healthy environments, and the threat of pandemics, as illustrated by COVID-19. Moreover, consumers are exhibiting a growing demand for centralized management of the data, seamless end-to-end journeys, and increased access when it comes to services and products¹. If these urgent challenges are left unaddressed, health care players can be left behind as their consumers seek care from those who can provide virtual visits, continuous health monitoring technology, and seamless access to services and health data. Digital health is able to address the current pain points and consumer demands, improving the quality and availability of care by removing friction from the current system. The primary way in which digital health solutions achieve such results is **interoperability**. Interoperability involves the efficient

Terminology

Digital health: We define digital health, or virtual health, as the use of technology (wearable devices, mobile health apps, telehealth, electronic records, etc.) to improve individuals' health

Telehealth: We define telehealth as a providers' use of video, audio, and/or messaging technology to provide care or treatment to consumers without requiring face-to-face interaction

integration of platforms, people, and processes. In 2016, the government made it a legislative focus with the passing of the 21st Century Cures Act, a bill requiring core tenants of interoperability aimed at improving consumer experience. The Cures Act requires increased exchange of electronic health information, accessible APIs, and consumer access to transparent EHR data for certified vendors. In March of this year, the CMS released the next phase of the Cures Act designed to further reduce "information blocking," a practice which restricts access to health care information and slows down interoperability. By January 1, 2021, payers are required to provide both a Patient Access API, so that health data follows consumers from provider to provider and payer to payer, as well as a Provider Directory API, to clarify which providers are in-network². A state of total interoperability may seem difficult to achieve, but many players are making strides and responding to market and legislative movement in a variety of ways.

One example of an organization responding with interoperability solutions is NextGen, with its recent acquisitions of Medfusion and Otto Health. In November of 2019, NextGen acquired Medfusion and its comprehensive Patient Experience solutions, which include a flexible, self-scheduling solution for consumers, an EMR-agnostic portal that drives consumer engagement, and a robust portfolio of health care APIs³. With this acquisition, NextGen has established a foundational capability around interoperability on which it can deliver integrated, consumer-driven care. Medfusion cites the Cures Act as a positive step for the industry. This legislation has acted as an accelerant not only in Medfusion's ability to aggregate health data regardless of EMR system, but also in their progress developing APIs, allowing firms to gather medical record data in "a fraction of the time" compared to paper and scan methods⁴.

The following month, NextGen acquired OTTO Health, whose device-agnostic telehealth platform will help NextGen meet the rising demand for virtual visits⁵. When analyzed in conjunction, NextGen's recent actions point to what many consider to be the future of the consumer health care experience: a digital one-stop shop where consumers can schedule appointments and services, utilize virtual visits, and realize better health outcomes via simplified and transparent access to products and solutions.

It is becoming more evident that solutions enhancing consumer experience and engagement are driven by efficient interoperability. Consumers are increasingly seeking access to cost and quality

information on their care. Having capabilities to provide this information to consumers can not only increase their loyalty to providers, but also improve outcomes through higher consumer engagement and adherence to care plans.

So, what steps do health care players need to take to realize the improved health outcomes and cost reductions resulting from such a transition?



Be consumer-centric

Focus on the needs of the consumer; build trust and engage on their terms to deliver personalized health care, and in turn, this behavior will drive increased consumer loyalty.



Embrace digital enablement

Invest in digital, front-end capabilities to engage consumers, including robust platforms for scheduling and access, virtual visits, and telehealth technology, as well as digital core and digital enterprise capabilities to power consumer engagement.



Strive for full interoperability

Strategically make buy/partner/build decisions to fully integrate platforms. Interconnected APIs and advanced analytics capabilities will help remove friction from

consumer engagement and create tailored experiences for consumers to sustain well-being.

With interoperability being the foundation for these practices, how close is your organization to making this a reality?

Here are some examples illustrating the effective transition to serve consumers using the intersection of digital health and interoperability⁶:



Virtual clinical trials:

In 2019, a multinational pharmaceutical corporation partnered with a New Orleans-based health system to create an interoperability solution for clinical trials. The organizations will use the fast health interoperability resources (FHIR) standard to quickly transmit data from the provider's EHR system into clinical trial databases. This can help the pharmaceutical corporation recruit for clinical trials, reduce the burden of manual data entry, decrease costs, and accelerate clinical trials, according to the organizations.



Hospital at home:

One digital health care player improves adoption of cardiac rehab programs through its mobile platform. Services are digital, so consumers can be rehabilitated at home.

The program's adoption rate is three times higher than conventional approaches, and it costs a fourth of traditional models. Many leading digital health applications are powered by interoperability-focused platforms such as SMART (on FHIR), ultimately allowing for integration with holistic consumer health platforms.



Physician shopping:

One digital health company helps consumers search and make appointments with physicians. Users can filter lists of physicians based on the services they provide, location, and availability. With experiences and an information database of more than 188 million consumers, the platform also helps users determine whether physicians accept particular health plans and estimate the approximate costs of a visit based on historical analysis of insurance claims. This comprehensive database functionality is made possible by ensuring the presence of cross-system connectivity and data exchange capabilities that define interoperability at its core.

Each health care player's readiness is unique in the transition to consumer-centered, digital solutions powered by interoperability. It is critical that providers and plans alike continue to take steps forward in order to achieve the benefits for both consumers and health systems.

Contact us:

Tony Jurek

Managing Director

Deloitte Consulting LLP
+1 612 816 3828
tjurek@deloitte.com

Mark Bethke

Managing Director

Deloitte Consulting LLP
+1 612 397 4327
mbethke@deloitte.com

Christi Skalka

Managing Director

Deloitte Consulting LLP
+1 512 689 0167
cskalka@deloitte.com

Contributors:

Dan Fleisher, and Johnny Weger

Endnotes:

1. [The digital health imperative for health plans](#)
2. [CMS Releases Finalized Rule on Interoperability](#)
3. [NextGen Acquires Medfusion for \\$43M](#)
4. [Interoperability Capstone—The Cures Act](#)
5. [NextGen Acquires OTTO Health to Expand Telemedicine Capabilities](#)
6. [Six assumptions for measuring health disruption](#)

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