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Reshaping Access to Healthcare Through

Human-Centered Technology

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All too often, patients don't have access to essential healthcare

information, preventing them from making fully informed decisions and receiving the full amount of care that they need. However, innovations in healthcare technology are helping to bridge the gap in access and give people the tools to take control of their health.

Through the use of human-centered digital health tools, organizations and healthcare providers can ensure that patients have everything they need to understand their personal health journeys and advocate for their own care.

Read on to learn more about how to use human-centered healthcare technology to improve access to and delivery of healthcare.

Improving Healthcare Access via User Empowerment

When designing healthcare technology for improved availability, user empowerment — in other words, ensuring that each person has control over their own care — is key. Benjy Silverman, Senior Scientific Consultant at Significo, says this means building digital healthcare tools with the end user in mind.

"While building these tools, we're trying to engage with the people who will use them and to make sure that the technology is designed for them and gives them tools they can actually use," he explains.

When healthcare technology is designed with the end user in mind, it accomplishes several purposes.

Provides access to information. Digital health tools can provide resources that users might not otherwise have access to and help people understand their own health conditions, learn about available solutions, and make informed decisions.

Creates personalized experiences. Each user has unique health needs and goals. Digital health tools can be tailored to each user, creating personalized experiences that are more engaging and effective than generalized approaches would be.

Offers control over health decisions. When people have access to information and resources that cater to their unique health journeys, they are better able to advocate for their own healthcare and have much more control over their health decisions and outcomes.

In this way, human-centered healthcare technology — that is, technology designed to meet end users' unique health needs — not only gives users more control over their healthcare but also gives them access to a much wider range of resources and information than they might otherwise receive.

Gaps in Healthcare Access

While there are many challenges in designing human-centered healthcare technology, Silverman identifies the primary challenge as simply getting the patient's voice involved in the process of developing these tools.

Often, the people designing digital health tools are not patients themselves, and they may come from different backgrounds than the end users. "This creates a gap in translation," Silverman explains, "between what we might think is understandable and useful and what is actually understandable and useful to the patients."

To bridge this gap, Silverman says healthcare technology designers must involve community partners and patients in the entire planning and design process to ensure the tools will actually be useful. At the same time, though, he cautions that each patient's experience is unique.

When involving actual patients' voices in the design process, then, it's essential to include a diverse range of representatives within the population the tool is intended to serve, not just one or two examples. This kind of personalized communication takes time, and too often healthcare workers simply don't have enough time to provide it.

As the healthcare industry faces widespread understaffing and burnout problems, it becomes a challenge for healthcare professionals to explain important health information in such a way that patients can understand it and give truly informed consent for their treatment.

However, according to Silverman, this challenge is also an opportunity. Digital health tools can bridge the gaps in access and translation, providing people with clear explanations of their health conditions and needs, as well as resources they wouldn't otherwise know to search for.

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Healthcare Technology as a Bridge

Historically, healthcare providers have relied on either in-person conversations between doctor and patient or written consent forms to communicate healthcare information. These methods are inadequate, because:

- The language used is too technical for the average patient to understand

- Conversations are too brief to convey all the necessary information

- Patients often don't remember important information given immediately following their diagnosis or other upsetting news

- Patients or their accompanying loved ones may not be able to take sufficient notes during the conversation

- There is little time or opportunity to ask for additional information

Through the use of healthcare technology, however, patients can receive all the information they need digitally, in familiar language and at their own pace.

Additionally, they can receive this information in a variety of formats — e.g., interactive software programs, videos, etc. — that may help them understand and retain the information better. And if they need further information, digital health tools can provide resources for more in-depth education.

Using healthcare technology to bridge the gaps in access to healthcare doesn't only benefit patients. A recent study by the World Health Organization based in Europe showed that the use of digital tools also improves healthcare worker performance, capabilities, and mental health.

Just as digital health tools give patients access to information about managing their own health, they also give healthcare providers access to knowledge, tools, and other resources that equip them to serve their patients better and more efficiently.

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Considerations for Effective Digital Health Tools

To create effective human-centered healthcare technology that provides access to healthcare information to all patients, certain considerations must be taken into account. Such tools must handle patients' health data securely and ethically and also be both available and affordable to people of all socioeconomic backgrounds.

Handling Health Data

Human-centered healthcare technology addresses unique health needs for each user. Thus, users must be willing to share their health data so that the technology can provide a personalized experience.

This means patients must feel confident that their health data will be kept secure, that it will only be used for the purposes they have been informed of and consented to, and that they will receive valuable information and positive health outcomes in exchange for providing this data.

Closing the "Digital Divide"

While technology in general has become increasingly available worldwide, a "digital divide" still exists wherein certain regions of the world have extremely limited access to technology, including healthcare technology.

Digital health tools can only benefit people who actually use them. So to improve the effectiveness of these tools, we must also consider how to increase their reach to include people all over the world who might not have access to the same types of technology.

Monetizing Healthcare Technology

While digital health tools need to generate enough revenue to justify their development, they also need to be affordable to end users. Insurance companies and employers who provide digital health tools to their members and employees can help make these tools financially affordable to a broader range of people.

Additionally, users — and any organization leaders who pay for their employees or members to use the tools — must be able to understand the value they can expect to get from purchasing and using them.

User Benefits of Human-Centered Health Tools

In addition to more available health information and resources, human-centered healthcare technology offers a number of benefits to users, especially in the areas of personalized experiences and satisfaction.

Personalized Experiences

By addressing each user's unique health needs and goals, human-centered digital health tools can create personalized experiences that help people improve the quality of their own lives.

Not only can users easily access the information they need to make informed healthcare decisions, but they can also receive recommendations and tools for self-care that

address all areas of their health and well-being — physical, mental, and emotional — and that are tailored to their own needs and objectives.

As a result, users gain a deeper understanding of their current health conditions and available treatment options and are able to engage with this information however and whenever they choose.

Engagement & Satisfaction

The more user-friendly a digital health tool is, and the more high-quality, personalized content it provides, the more likely people will be to use it on a regular basis — and the more likely they are to achieve their desired health outcomes.

Ultimately, simply making healthcare technology available to the general public won't be very effective if people don't see

enough value in the tools to engage with their content, or if they aren't satisfied with the overall experience of using the tools.

Through positive, personalized user experiences, however, digital health tools can help encourage people to actively engage with and improve their own health.

Organizational Benefits of Human-Centered Health Tools

Human-centered healthcare technology offers benefits at the organizational level and on an individual basis. Benefits for organizations that implement human-centered care principles and provide digital health tools to their employees and members include:

Enhanced member experiences. Human-centered care communicates that each individual is valued as an essential part of the whole organization. This cultivates a positive experience for every member and/or employee, driving engagement and overall satisfaction.

Improved work performance. Digital health tools empower people to take control of improving their own health. As a result, they're also able to improve the overall quality of their lives and perform better at work.

Increased loyalty. When people feel valued and effective in their roles — and when they receive access to resources that help them improve their health outcomes — they're much more likely to remain loyal to the organization.

Greater competitive edge. Just as people have more incentive to stay with an organization that offers digital health tools to its employees or members, offering these tools also gives organizations an advantage over their competitors when acquiring new talent.

By implementing human-centered healthcare technology and principles, organizations can align their overall objectives with individual employee goals, leading to individual satisfaction and collective success.

Innovations for Improving Access to Healthcare

Recent and emerging innovations in healthcare technology continue to increase access to healthcare by catering to diverse user needs. For example, the introduction of telemedicine allows people in remote areas or whose circumstances prevent them from visiting a doctor or specialist to receive expert medical attention.

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Not only do these tools make it easy for patients to keep track of and compile their own information to share with their healthcare providers, but they can also alert patients of potential problems early on.

Other healthcare technology innovations in the areas of remote monitoring, automation, artificial intelligence, and more provide even more opportunities for patients to control their own healthcare, access high-quality care (even without in-person doctor visits), and educate themselves about their current and potential health needs.

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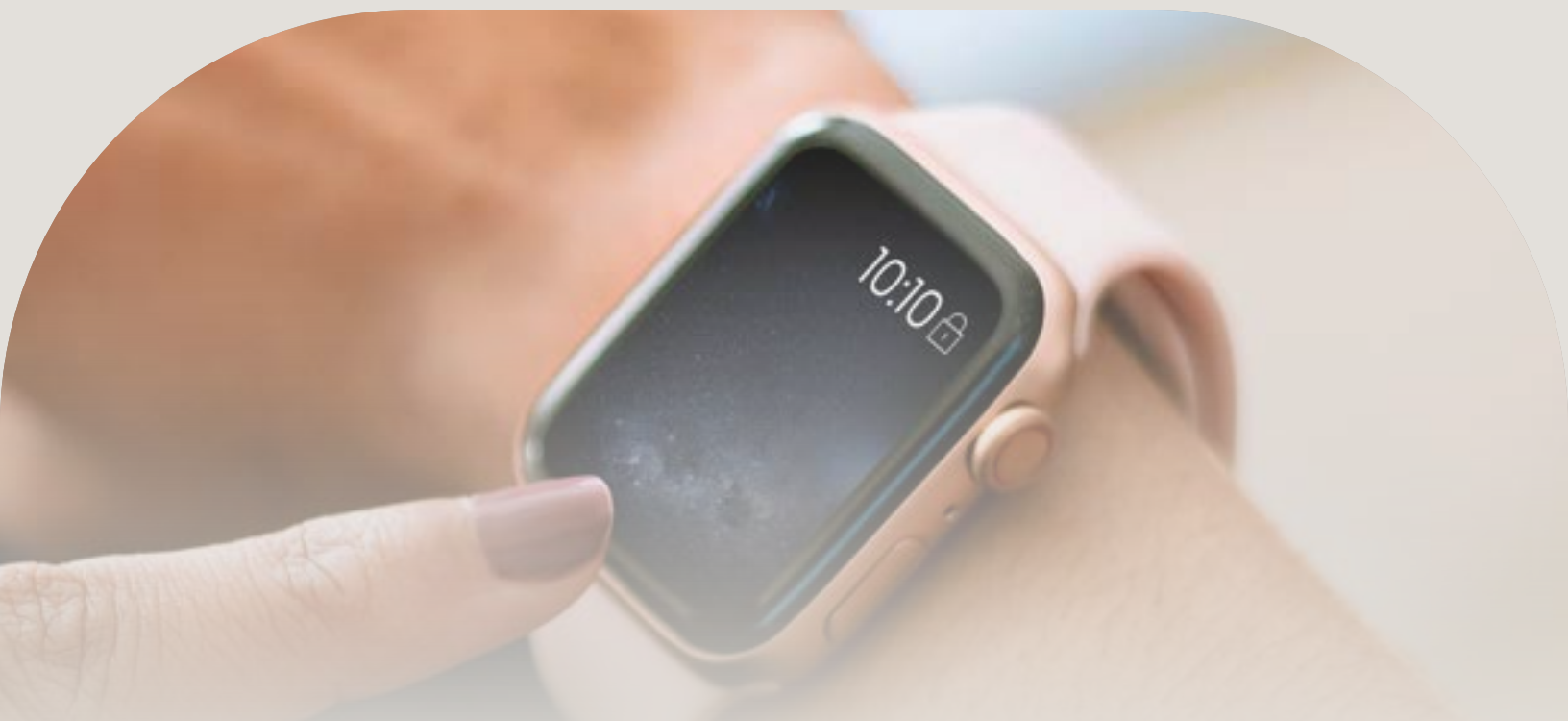
Strategies for Implementing Human-Centered Tools

When designing and implementing human-centered healthcare technology for improved access, Silverman says the key is to keep the user experience front and center.

This goes beyond asking how easy and enjoyable it is for people to use the tool — although those things are important — and instead asking how the tool will make a meaningful difference for their health.

How, specifically, will this technology help create a better experience for the user, either in getting treatment from a healthcare provider or in taking care of themselves or their loved ones? And how does the technology account for a variety of users with different ideas of what makes a digital health tool useful?

"The real challenge here is that we're trying to design something that's human-centered, and every human being is different," Silverman observes. "It may not be possible to build something to suit all of those groups of people, so it has to be customizable."

That's why it's so important to involve diverse representatives throughout the process of designing and building healthcare technology. Otherwise, you may end up with a tool that only suits a handful of patient types, or one that doesn't address the needs of actual patients at all.

Finally, it's crucial to get continuous feedback from users, because many digital health tools run independently from the healthcare system. Without input from patients who are trying to use the tools in conjunction with their existing care, you risk creating a tool that won't integrate well with others and therefore won't end up being used.

Healthcare Availability Reshaped

Human-centered healthcare technology helps bridge the gaps in access to healthcare information and resources by offering personalized experiences and giving people a voice to advocate for their own health needs. The key is to prioritize the individual user experience and offer solutions that are tailored to each person's unique healthcare needs.

By exploring and implementing human-centered digital care strategies and tools within your organization, you can help reshape access to and delivery of healthcare, thereby enhancing member experiences, driving better health outcomes, and ensuring that your organization remains at the forefront of the digital healthcare landscape.

At Significo, we're committed to increasing access to healthcare and empowering individuals to take control of their health data for better health outcomes and work performance.

Schedule a demo to see what Significo can do for your organization.