

How Automation can transform Enterprise & Patient Journey

01 March 2022 | Views

With the explosion of data around us and the increasing ability through advanced analytics and machine learning to be able to use data for better patient outcomes, there cannot be a more exciting time to be in healthcare. The importance of more relevant data on value and outcomes is being validated by manufacturers, researchers, and even regulators. And it's all coming together in a more precise understanding of the human experience in healthcare. Let's explore further



From the lens of healthcare, I would bucket data into three parts - Data relating to Population Health, Patients and pertaining to the supply chain.

Population health data

India's experience through the pandemic has highlighted the importance of and need for accurate and updated data relating to population health. While there is a huge amount of data available, it is patchy and not current as we are still heavily dependent on census data that is collected every 10 years. Efforts underway through the National Digital Health Mission to build the backbone and digital pathways necessary for the country's health infrastructure, so as to be able to capture timely health data, will go a long way in addressing this lacuna.

Patient health data

While we have an emerging innovation ecosystem and a lot of innovation has happened in drug development and building the healthcare infrastructure, not much innovation has taken place in care delivery and patient data sets. But now, as more clinics and hospitals are being digitised and more programmes are focusing on disease management, particularly chronic disease, we are beginning to see a mindset shift in how data is being utilised to design better health outcomes, both at an aggregate level and at a deidentified patient level. This mindset shift is being supported by both, government as well as the private life sciences sector since it impacts the whole ecosystem. Having said that, we still have a long way to go compared to other emerging markets, because there are black spaces in the road to digitisation. Only 5-7 per cent of our country's prescribers use any kind of digital platform and less than 5 per cent of our population have digital patient records, while only around 10-15 per cent of hospitals use an EMR (electronic medical record) or clinical platform. But we have started on the digitisation journey and the data it generates will be incredibly valuable to make our healthcare system more accessible as well as efficient.

Supply chain data

One of the early disruptions in countries like China and Indonesia which embarked on large universal health programmes was the consolidation of the supply chain. We see the same starting to happen in India today. We have more than 55,000 – 60,000 thousand distributors and stockists, and there is a whole digital ecosystem that is building up at two to three times the growth rate of the traditional channel.

During the pandemic waves, we saw what the lack of a robust digital supply chain network could result in with supply chain bottlenecks, lack of visibility on endpoints, inventory pile ups. That continues to happen in parts even today because we have a fragmented supply chain. Access to supply chain data will help curb wastage and ensure that drugs are available at chemists where demand is generated. Track and trace systems will have a particularly strong impact in identifying and weeding out fake drugs which is a very important requirement for India given the huge geography we cater to.

Of the one million odd chemists in India today, while there is rapid automation taking place at the chemist level, only around 10 per cent of chemists use any kind of a digital platform so there is huge opportunity for automation at the chemist level too. Digitisation will help drive more consolidated data that will be incredibly important for every stakeholder, whether it's the pharma company or the wholesaler or the chemist.

I believe the healthcare industry in India could learn lessons in automation from three industries - telecom, financial services and retail. Telecom is most important as it followed the same route to building an analytics-driven mindset and model to completely disrupt cost to access. Fintech, because it has brought down the transaction cost and digitised the customer interaction, while it has also understood how to provide security at the individual level to protect data and privacy. And retail because it has worked through a lot of digitisation, using technology for precision segmentation and targeting of customers and channel partners.

When it comes to innovation, we can also learn a lot from entrepreneurs and startups working in geospatial intelligence for logistics, retail and financial services that could be relevant for healthcare, because our ability to tap and understand different micro markets and segments from a geographical perspective could help build a stronger supply chain and access points. There are also many startups who are working to bring down the cost of healthcare acquisition and ease of access to delivery, building platforms and marketplaces to create greater customer experiences that we can learn from. Finally, I think we should also tap into ecosystems and communities that are being built for user generated content and opinion where we have an opportunity to listen to patient and doctor communities.

As we evolve and build a more data-centric healthcare system, and as important it is to share data to drive better insights and patient outcomes, we need to make sure we use data responsibly and understand the implications of how we collect and share data. The government and regulatory authorities need to play an important role in ensuring and steering discussions towards such issues so that there is greater awareness across the healthcare ecosystem.

As we go through the automation journey in India, we need to look at automation as a process to transform the enterprise and patient journey, and not just to generate revenue. The world is counting on us for innovations and scientific breakthroughs to improve societal health.

Amit Mookim, Managing Director, IQVIA South Asia