



Digital Health Services

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This article is based on **“The salience of digital medical services was highlighted during the pandemic”** which was published in The Indian Express on 09/02/2021. It talks about the benefits and challenges associated with Digital Health Services.

In the last few years, it's been extremely encouraging to see how integrating technology and new innovative tools can improve public service delivery. For example, the development of IndiaStack and the JAM (Jan Dhan, Aadhaar, and Mobile) trinity.

Similarly, the Covid-19 pandemic re-emphasized the need to reimagine the health system in the digital space. The recent launch of the **National Digital Health Mission** highlights the use of digital technology in the health sector.

Further, as the cost of treating chronic conditions is increasing and doctor shortages are imminent worldwide, digital health can provide much-needed transformation in pursuit of realizing the goal of the health of all.

National Digital Health Mission

- In order to realize the vision for universal health coverage, the Government of India launched the National Digital Health Mission (NDHM) in 2020.
- The NDHM is a complete digital health ecosystem. The digital platform will be launched with four key features — health ID, personal health records, Digi Doctor, and health facility registry.
- The NDHM is implemented by the National Health Authority (NHA) under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- NDHM is a manifestation of one of the guidelines of the National Health Policy 2017 that had envisaged the creation of a digital health technology eco-system aiming at developing an integrated health information system.
- It is a landmark move that is based on the principles of the India health stack and aims to connect the different touch-points of the health ecosystem, such as Health Information Provider to Health Information User to Consent Manager, through digital tools to provide affordable access to quality healthcare.

- The NDHM also aims to ensure that preventive and assistive healthcare come under the same broader umbrella.

Benefits of Digital Health Services

- **Tackling the Spread of a Pandemic:** Once data is recorded and available for analysis, it can help the systems determine both prevalence and genomic data to provide information on disease transmission and geospatial coverage.
Innovative use of digital tools such as deep learning and cloud emergency response algorithms has significantly aided emergency room workers during the pandemic to reduce response time.
- **Patient-Friendly Health:** The deployment of artificial intelligence tools for all aspects of the health system, including triaging, diagnostics, among others, will substantially reduce delays, and, therefore, the costs associated with healthcare.
Digital transformation of healthcare is at the core of addressing issues such as resource limitations, a varied population mix, and an urgent need to increase medical reach.
- **Preventive Care:** Emerging technologies not only expedite the development of new drugs but also introduce a completely new class of therapies, such as digital therapeutics (DTx).
 - DTx are software-based solutions that can treat disease or disorder which are linked to lifestyle issues.
 - Thus, digital health has a growing impact on the delivery of care and provides the opportunity to tackle the next frontier in healthcare by shifting the focus from treatment to prevention.
- **Helps in Clinical Trials:** Digital health can harness the power of data that can aid in the analysis of samples and images to diagnose as well as drive better clinical decision-making.

Associated Challenges

- **Risk of Online Fraud:** The lack of access to care and diminishing trust towards the healthcare system can make patients turning to inefficient therapies and online medical quackery.
- **Issue of Health Literacy:** Despite the use of digital technologies, the development of health status is also dependent on health literacy.
Those with lower health literacy levels are generally in a worse state of health, visit the doctor more often, use fewer prevention techniques, and on the whole, are more costly for the healthcare system.

- **Addressing Out-of-pocket Expenditure:** Before the transition from traditional health care to digital healthcare, there is a need to protect the poor from the uncertainties of doctor hunting, receiving irrational treatment from unqualified medical practitioners, provide drugs and address the inability to pay for high-end diagnostics.

Unless the costs of outpatient treatment are catered, out-of-pocket expenditure will continue before a patient needs hospitalization.

- **Misuse of Data:** Before embracing digital healthcare, there is a need for certain checks and balances to ensure there is no misuse of the data.

In this context, the government should expedite enacting the Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019, which will ensure that consent for use of data can only be sought with the defined purposes.

Conclusion

The concept of digital health is the cultural transformation of how disruptive technologies that provide digital and objective data accessible to both caregivers and patients leads to an equal level doctor-patient relationship with shared decision-making and the democratization of care.

Drishti Mains Question

Discuss how the concept of digital health can lead to the democratization of care.



Watch Video At:

<https://youtu.be/ppdST2F4hZM>

This editorial is based on **“Take Nature for granted at your own peril”** published in The Economic Times on February 9th, 2020. Now watch this on our Youtube channel.