



Online Path to Healthcare

This article is based on the editorial, [“Online path to healthcare”](#), which was published in The Indian Express on 24/08/2020. It talks about the digital solutions to remove the barriers to healthcare in India and the challenges associated with it.

The [Covid-19 crisis](#) has exposed the shortcomings of the healthcare services across India. New challenges are emerging every day especially in the rural areas which lack even the basic healthcare facilities.

In such a situation digital solutions like oximeter and on **phone health care workers** have evolved as a game changer and have been able to solve the long standing problems of accessibility and even affordability to a great extent. However, the challenges remain and for e-health to be a success the basic systems must be in place.

E-Health

- E-Health is an emerging field which primarily refers to health services and information delivered through the internet and related technologies.
- In a broader sense, the term characterizes not only a technical development, but a commitment for networked, global thinking, to improve health care locally, regionally, and worldwide by using information and communication technology (ICT).

Benefits

Accessibility

- Accessibility to quality healthcare among the rural population is very poor as the village hospitals lack not only the physical infrastructure but also the manpower.
- This negatively affects health-seeking behaviour and severely impacts the country's healthcare burden as people tend to avoid going to hospitals which are at far location for common diseases which become fatal at later stages.
- Online solutions will bridge the gap and will provide the best solutions even to the hinterlands with the help of technology.

Efficiency

- One of the promises of e-health is to increase efficiency in health care, thereby decreasing costs.
- It would avoid duplicative or unnecessary diagnostic tests at several places and would save cost and efforts and would thus enhance efficiency.

Quality care

- E-health will enhance the quality of healthcare as rural and marginalised people will be able to have access through tele health services.

- Also comparisons between different providers will give additional power to consumers to choose the better health assurance.

Empowerment of consumers and patients

- By making the knowledge bases of medicine and personal electronic records accessible to consumers over the Internet, e-health opens new avenues for patient-centered medicine, and enables evidence-based patient choice.

Better coordination

- Information exchange and communication between the different health service providers would be easier and would help in formulating a uniform and standard solution to health.

Challenges

Infrastructure

- For E-Health to be successful, it's important that the minimum adequate infrastructure is in place.
- Access to the internet and presence of pathological labs are few of them.

Cost consciousness

- The healthcare sector needs to be cost conscious and expenditure on unnecessary tests and procedures must be eliminated.
- There is no national policy or standard protocol in this regard.

Data Security

- Ensuring data security remains one of the biggest challenges.
- Patients and healthcare professionals alike need to feel one hundred percent confident about the confidentiality of digital health systems.

Training

- Engaging and training doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals, in the new technologies are essential else the whole idea would fail. The very backbone of this model is ICT and a trained manpower in ICT.

Pooling the knowledge

- By pooling knowledge and resources across surgeries, hospitals and countries integrated E-Health systems can be developed faster and for the good of all.
- It has been seen that big private hospitals are generally reluctant to share the best practices in general.

Way Forward

Filling the Gaps

- It is important to identify and analyse geographical, financial, social and systemic barriers to access and fill them. Increasing the budget for healthcare should be the first step in that direction.

Training

- Not only the doctors, nurses, medical and technical staff need to be trained, skilled and equipped, but their services have to be equitably distributed across regions.
- Remote and rural areas are especially plagued with staff shortages.
- Patients will have to be made aware to ensure that the potential of efficient healthcare systems

are maximised.

A National Policy

- A clear, enforceable policy on human resources is needed to ensure that every single patient in India is taken care of by sensitive, trained and competent healthcare workers.
- Clear demarcation of processes and procedures are essential to ensure accountability and for that a national policy on E-Health must be passed which will bring transparency and uniformity across the country.

Online Portals and Apps

- Online patient portals also provide medical test results, diagnosis and give patients detailed explanations of their illnesses, saving doctors precious time.
- Devices like health rate monitors, exercise and activity trackers and sweat meters allow people to keep track of some aspects of their health without having to visit a doctor.
- The use of such devices can help flag irregularities at an early stage.

Other Applications of Technology in Healthcare

- It ranges from drone delivery of life-saving medicines, blood components or devices to inaccessible areas to remotely conducted robotic surgeries and even use of augmented reality (AR) glasses that could allow first responders to connect with faraway specialists in a matter of seconds.

Conclusion

- It cannot be overstated that solving basic healthcare challenges is crucial for ensuring the good health of the nation. It must be equitable, fair, affordable and transparent.
- Digital solutions can remove long standing problems of Indian medical systems but for that basic systems must be in place.

Drishti Mains Question

Do you feel E-Health can be the way out to our healthcare issues to a great extent? Discuss.

This editorial is based on [“Less taxing: On National Recruitment Agency”](#) which was published on August 21st, 2020. Now watch this on our Youtube channel.

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