

Use Digital Healthcare to Save Money and Live Healthier

Many of us who are reasonably healthy get into a routine of buying medicine at a pharmacy and visiting doctors when we feel really ill. Look a little further, though, and digital innovation can keep you healthier, lower your costs and make healthcare more convenient.

Telemedicine is Easy and Effective

While we may occasionally hear about apps or telemedicine, the multitude of new digital services is greater than we might think. Innovations range from telemedicine and automated tracking or diagnoses to remote monitoring with specialised devices and robots doing swabs.

The real question for most people, though, is what they can do easily and what's in it for them. The biggest benefits may come from telemedicine, which lets consumers talk to a doctor via video and get a diagnosis or even medicine. Usage has skyrocketed.

Whereas virtual healthcare provider MyDoc faced resistance from consumers and clinical staff initially, for example, PWC's Zubin Daruwalla told the EDB that the firm's Covid-19 clinic saw a 32-fold jump in weekly sign-ups in its first weekend during the pandemic. Doctor Anywhere similarly saw a sharp increase in adoption during the Circuit Breaker, CEO Lim Wai Mun told StartupSG, and there is better take-up among people from 45 to their 60s.

For consumers who prefer traditional Chinese medicine, Eu Yan Sang partnered with MyDoc for teleconsultation and enables customers to order online or through social media.

A key benefit, according to consulting firm Oliver Wyman, is that virtual visits are typically 20 percent cheaper than physical ones. Costs range from S\$12 to S\$18 for consultations booked through DBS Nav, for example.

Some firms supplement telemedicine with home visits. The DA Care Team from Doctor Anywhere, for instance, can visit your home to provide medical services, deliver medicines or even perform simple procedures.

For hypertension patients, the Primary Tech Enhanced Care initiative from Singapore's Ministry of Health (MOH) allows them to submit blood pressure readings through a Bluetooth machine, MOH assistant director Angela Yeo told GovInsider. Whereas patients used to see a doctor every three-to-six months, nurses can call them when their readings are abnormal and patients receive recommendations via SMS.

A key question is whether it works. A variety of studies show it's effective. On a broad basis, for example, a meta-study by researchers at the University of California and other schools found that telehealth interventions generally appear equivalent to in-person care. Researchers at the University of Nebraska focused on diabetes patients and similarly found that telemedicine is more effective in improving treatment outcomes compared to conventional care.

Apps to Stay Healthy

On a daily basis, apps can also help us to stay healthy. Along with apps from healthcare providers or startups, insurance companies and banks now have apps too.

Some apps help you improve your lifestyle to live healthier. AXA Singapore suggests Nike Training Club for free workouts, MyFitnessPal or YouAte to help eat healthier, Insight Timer to reduce stress, and Sleep Cycle to sleep better.

Apps from insurance companies and banks focus more specifically on wellness. Prudential's Pulse app, for example, offers 24/7 access to health information and services. Users can check their symptoms or conduct a digital health assessment. An AI-powered chatbot offers insights into health conditions and guides them to self-care or a doctor.

Great Eastern similarly offers GetGreat, a wellness app that offers activities and guidance. And DBS Bank's My Health Portal NAV University and DBS Communities offer insights and healthcare seminars on how you to improve your physical health.

More is Coming Soon

While these digital innovations help us with everyday care, specialised solutions are available and more is on the way.

Already, SingHealth chief digital strategy officer Benedict Tan told GovInsider, SingHealth is using robots to conduct Covid-19 swab tests and teleconsultations. A new Primary Tech Enhanced Care initiative allows hypertension patients to submit their blood pressure readings regularly through a Bluetooth machine, according to MoH's Angelo Yeo. Healthcare providers can then analyse these readings and intervene when necessary.

Before long, consumers are likely to be able to send data about their condition to healthcare providers with an app rather than struggling to explain their symptoms. The app could flag precursors to serious issues, and healthcare providers can use recommendations based on the data and predictive analytics to adjust a patient's medication or to schedule a video consultation. LifeTrack vice president Scott Yeo said his firm is working to make diagnostic imaging services more accessible, to identify diseases earlier and lighten the clinical load on hospitals.

We Need to Use What's There

While the multitude of digital healthcare services can clearly make our lives better, not enough people use them.

While more than half of Singaporean respondents in a survey said they use health technology or apps to track key indicators such as physical activity or blood pressure, Philips Country manager Ivy Lai noted that 43 percent of Singaporeans who track health indicators have never shared data with healthcare professionals.

A key issue may be that it is too easy to continue our existing patterns. Whereas more than 80 percent of consumers in less mature healthcare markets such as India and Indonesia are interested in digital health solutions, according to consulting firm Oliver Wyman only 58 percent of Singaporeans said the same thing.

While digital healthcare won't do everything for you, it can make your life healthier and more convenient while saving you money. Rather than just continuing with current routines, it's time to take a look at digital solutions and start using them.