



HEALTHCARE TECH LEADERS PREPARE FOR POST- PANDEMIC POWER SHIFT

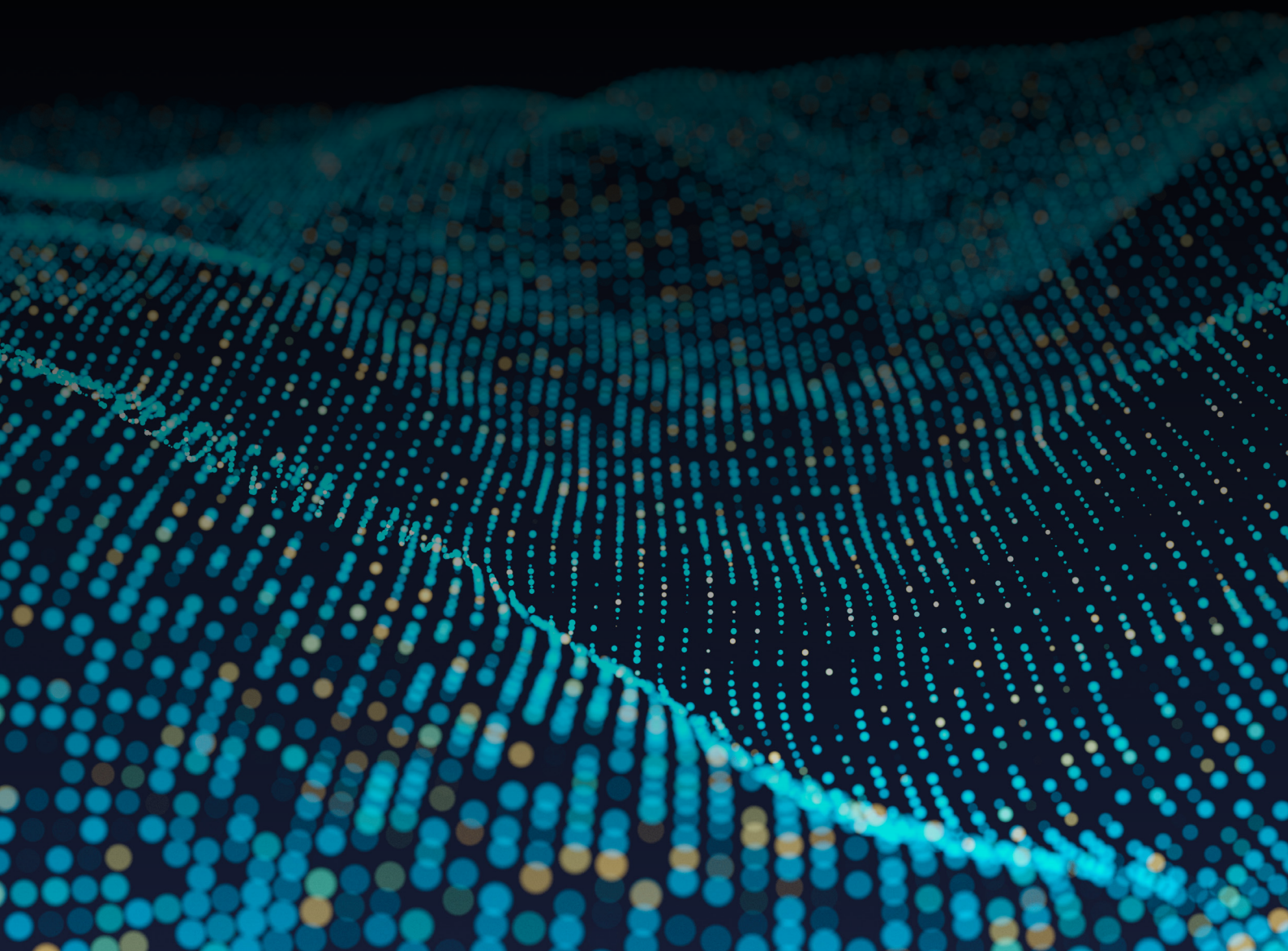
TECHNOLOGY TO PLAY AN INCREASINGLY
IMPORTANT ROLE IN MODERN HEALTHCARE

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OCTOBER 2021



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Health technology revolutions have had a number of false dawns, but as the world recovers from the Coronavirus pandemic, there is not only renewed enthusiasm for technology-led change but also the investment is available. CXOs and researchers reveal that technology is set to play an increasingly important role in improving patient care and health service operations.



Healthcare spending will increase in 95% of organizations, according to global research carried out by the Azure Knowledge Corporation. Technology analyst house Gartner agrees and reports: “Healthcare IT spending will grow by 6.8% in 2021 to reach \$140 billion. Healthcare providers are gradually emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic with a renewed focus on digital transformation.” Over the course of 2022, the surveyed health technology leaders are expected to make investments in clinical mobile technology, as well as core health IT systems. While Gartner finds that in addition, health CIOs will be investing in robotic process automation (RPA), artificial intelligence (AI) and increasing their usage of cloud.

Inevitably, the Coronavirus pandemic has revealed shortcomings in policy, healthcare systems, and the technology estates that are in use by healthcare providers and government agencies. The scale of the pandemic demonstrated that all areas of care and health technology needed modernization, including management of assets, inventory, patient care, workforces, and workflow.

“Technology is starting to grow and to be recognized as a major function,” says Rich Corbridge, CIO of pharmaceutical retailer Boots in the UK and former national health CIO for the Republic of Ireland.

“There’s a change in the air as digital has had so much attention,” says healthcare CIO Shauna McMahon, adding that demand is not only from within the healthcare providers. “Patients want that experience. Also, we are undergoing a generation change, and we have workers coming into the NHS that don’t know about working with paper.

“So, it is a sector that is having to change really quickly, but also be sensitive to those that are not from a technology-only orientation,” McMahon says. The Canadian CIO, currently working in the UK, is leading a healthcare provider that has been deemed underperforming by the nation’s regulatory body. As part of the organization’s plans to improve performance, McMahon has been hired to transform technology and to use that tech in the modernization of the health provider.

Better care

At the center of the demand for improvements to health technology is the patient - as it should be. But, to deliver better care, health providers must also improve the care they deliver to the clinical staff within their organizations. The Azure Knowledge Corporation research finds that two-thirds of clinicians and 69% of healthcare technology leaders agree that frontline care staff are overworked during a shift. This is leading to fatigue and burnout among frontline healthcare staff, with 87% of North American health technology leaders concerned about burnout, 85% of Europeans, and 84% of Latin American health tech leaders.

And the picture is the same for those health workers that are not frontline carers; over half of survey respondents say their administration teams are overburdened and often unable to complete their work during a shift. All of which reduces the care being given to the patient.

"I really do believe technology can impact the patient experience. Being able to use technology means we can fill all our appointments, and reduce the waiting list," says CIO McMahon, who digitized the out-patient appointment communications and instantly delivered improvements in the care at the hospital in Lincolnshire.

"Five or six years ago virtual consultations were discussed, in four months people were using them, and we are looking at major efficiencies in time, reducing carbon impact, and increasing the use of virtual appointments can help reduce operational costs over the long term," she adds of how patient-centric technology moved forward during the pandemic. "If we can use technology to create a relationship, and work with people when they are at their most vulnerable, then we can prevent a serious incident. With monitoring, we can provide a better life experience. We can find ways to focus on health and preventing illnesses," she says.

Corbridge agrees with McMahon and says: "Health will rely on technology more and more, and we will empower patients to do more for themselves. We will also see systems provide ways for the patient to care for themselves."



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As in the enterprise, increased collaboration between healthcare professionals will improve the care patients receive. “With a paper chart, only one person can look at that chart at a time. So now we get a team approach to care, and that is better quality care and safer for the patient and the professional.

“Also, with elderly and mental health patients, they can have family members that are helping them see the digital appointment letter. I refer to this as a more holistic circle of care,” McMahon says.

“Technology can be an accelerator to enhancing patient care,” Victoria Hurtado, Senior Director Information Technology at Kern Health Systems, a Californian healthcare provider, said at the recent .NEXT conference by Nutanix.

To improve care, healthcare providers are aware that they need to improve the administration and processes of their organizations. The Azure Knowledge Corporation research suggests that a new approach to improving healthcare organizations is taking place; in some economies, the last decade has seen public health leaders forced to make financial efficiencies. This cost-cutting exposed dangerous gaps in service provision during the pandemic, but in a post-pandemic world, healthcare technology leaders are now looking to optimize the organization. As a result, better care will be delivered without a significant increase in budget. Digitizing the traditional out-patient appointment letter has prevented 900 wasted appointments at the Lincolnshire, UK healthcare provider where McMahon is CIO.

To deliver an optimized healthcare provider, health technology leaders are modernizing the technology estate. “For many years, we leveraged a traditional three-tier architecture, and we faced many challenges with upkeep and spending,” Hurtado at Kern Health Systems says. “HCI was identified for its simplicity in upgrades and scaling. So, we moved the large systems like medical and claims management to the Nutanix HCI platform,” she says, adding that Kern also benefited from improved disaster recovery and Citrix thin-client environments. The latter was vital for Kern Health Systems during the pandemic.

To improve both patient care and health processes, the sector will need to improve the connectivity of information and technology across the health ecosystem. The survey finds that 55% of clinicians believe connecting hospital systems will improve communications between health workers. Eighty percent of clinicians and 87% of executives state patient care would improve if nurses, clinicians, and non-clinical healthcare workers had collaboration tools and healthcare applications.

But, as CIO Corbridge says, the change is not only about improving technological systems. “Most patients think that a GP record is available at the Accident and Emergency Department of a hospital; in reality, the GP and the hospital are two very different organizations.”

The scale and scope of change in health and healthcare technology will rely on the flexibility of enterprise cloud computing, as next generation technologies such as artificial intelligence begin to enter the sector. 2020s Coronavirus pandemic may lead to a legacy of improved healthcare, delivered by technology.



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