THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Setting healthcare free

VDI and enterprise cloud computing provide healthcare organizations with the tools to continue their transformation journeys, reduce costs and deliver new care methods.

Healthcare faces rising demands. Care is becoming more complex, often more expensive and civic authorities wish to pay for healthcare in new ways – paying for an outcome, for example, rather than a broad set of services. As a result, health organisations are looking to simplify and modernise their business operations. End-User computing transformation can both reduce the cost of the technology estate, but also free the organisation and its staff, clinical and administrative, from the health campus.

"Our current capital intensive, hospital-centric model is unsustainable and ineffective," the World Economic Forum reported in a whitepaper on the future of healthcare in 2019. Little did the World Economic Forum know that in less than a year the health services of the world would be overwhelmed by the coronavirus pandemic. Despite the continuing challenges of the pandemic, the virus has spread a renewed understanding that technology can help deliver better healthcare services and lower operational costs.

Pandemic or not, the healthcare sector faces some major challenges in the near future. The same report by the World Economic Forum found that by 2050 one in six people will be over the age of 65, and will be living with one or possibly more chronic diseases. This will result in global healthcare spending needing to continually increase and for the healthcare providers to reduce waste in their organisations in order to ensure funds are spent on healthcare, and not business processes.

“Populations are ageing, and medical advances offer more options for treating chronic diseases that a generation ago would have been hopeless cases,” says Hilary Thomas, KPMG Partner and its Chief Medical Adviser. Healthcare providers have found themselves in the unenviable position of managing chronic diseases. As a result, there is a need for an improvement in productivity, which can be delivered through new technologies – technology that helps clinicians provide care, but also technology that streamlines the management of a health organisation. During 2020, health services across Europe and the America’s rapidly adopted remote care technologies to decrease the number of visits patients had to make to health service centres; and also to protect its vital clinical teams from travelling and increasing their exposure to risk as a result of the pandemic. In tandem, these healthcare providers had to change business operations to allow non-clinical teams to continue their roles safely from home. The adoption of cloud-based end user computing, collaboration and enterprise tools has demonstrated to healthcare providers that the tools exist to inject more pace into their businesses.

The CIO of a major healthcare trust in Europe, which has a large rural catchment area, says recent events demonstrate that technology teams in health can redesign the services and approaches to healthcare, enabling more remote care and remote working. “And that means we can deal with the challenge of continued demand. I believe this will unleash the next generation of healthcare thinking.”

Not only is the healthcare sector realising it can heal its maladies with technology, but as with most vertical markets, technology-oriented startups are beginning to challenge the sector. Business advisory group McKinsey believes this is an opportunity for the health sector. “Healthcare incumbents and new entrants have a huge opportunity to tap into this innovation to gain market share, while improving the cost and quality of healthcare,” it said in a report on the next wave of healthcare innovation.

Governments, aware of a sea change in demand on healthcare, are also considering regulatory changes to allow integrated data sharing and increased transparency for the patient or consumer. Some governments and insurance providers are considering a move to outcome-based payments in place of existing blanket coverage. If this takes place, there will be an increased demand on healthcare providers to be agile and responsive, which will require a transformation in working practices and therefore the technology estate.

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TECHNICAL ROLE

Technology and IT teams played an instrumental role in enabling healthcare providers to cope with the unprecedented demand of the pandemic. CIOs and CTOs in the sector, working with clinical and administrative leaders, are also at the forefront of operational improvements. "The value of digital, first and foremost, is to enhance patient safety, quality of care and more recently to improve the patient's experience of healthcare," says the CIO of a major health provider. Digital methods, from remote working, modern records management systems, mobile applications and collaboration tools will improve the care provided by clinicians and non-clinical staff, as the responsiveness of digital technologies provides an enhanced ability to perform tasks, analyse information and serve the patient.

But, this is not without its challenges, the budget demands on healthcare providers are under intense pressure and there will always be an expectation for the largest slice of the budget to go to the clinical use cases. But as leading healthcare CIOs report, improving the end-user computing experience and the technology estate can deliver significant benefits.

"We must also get past the notion that technology is unaffordable, and that the longer-term investment in technology, to enable care, should come ahead of shorter-term investment to address immediate pressures on healthcare services like staffing. I believe we have not passed this point," one health service CIO says.

Modernising the end-user computing estate is just one-way enterprise cloud computing can increase the ability to care and reduce the technology costs of a healthcare provider. Research by technology analyst house IDC finds that enterprise cloud can reduce operating costs over five years by as much as 62%. Improving the end-user computing experience with the deployment of a virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI) improves productivity by 85% says IDC, and reduces downtime by 72%. The same IDC study found that organisations using VDI witnessed improvements in application performance and accessibility, which led to the VDI environment being extended across the organisation. "As a result, the 973 employees on average at these organisations — including healthcare and education organisations — who use VDI for their day-to-day work are noticeably more productive (5.6% on average)," reports IDC.

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