

# Digital is the way to go for hospitals

To patients, hospitals are regarded as sanctums of healing, but the truth is private sector facilities must also be sustainable businesses. To do so, they need to be and remain competitive by offering better services at a lower cost, especially with the opening of more and more new hospitals, clinics and other private healthcare facilities.

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Digitisation also holds great promise in public healthcare but fundamental challenges like management leadership, ICT infrastructure, staff training and organisational change management must be overcome to create the required positive impact.

Digitisation is sweeping through the healthcare industry with older private hospital groups grappling and catching up with digitisation while new hospitals are coming to market fully digitised without the burden of legacy systems.

## Faster, better, more cost effective

Process optimisation is a challenge for many hospitals as many entrenched internal and patient facing processes are undocumented. Legacy systems with historic data are entrenched making the journey to digitisation expensive and complex. Digitisation with embedded best practice processes can create material benefits to hospitals, for example like the ability to access patient and doctor records electronically from a central system at any point, at any time, can make daily operations faster - and cheaper.

A centralised system enables authorised medical staff to easily access and adjust patient records quickly and simply. Not only does this make life easier for medical practitioners, but patients benefit from faster service delivery and more accurate clinical data which in turn bolsters the attractiveness of the institution through an improved patient interaction experience.

Taken a step further, independent applications (longitudinal health records) exist to store medical data for a single patient across all medical institutions, enabling hospitals to better assist patients no matter where they go. Hospitals which leverage such applications are able to treat patients quicker and more effectively as historical clinical data is readily available.

## Simplifying medical claims

Medical claims management for patients from the hospital can be a source of revenue loss when not done correctly or in a timely manner.

There are typically two areas of integration between a hospital and a medical insurance provider: validating the required patient procedures with accurate information and at discharge processing the subsequent claim. Often, the challenge is that hospitals can misquote or incorrectly claim. If any information is incomplete from the quote or claim, the medical insurer will not pay out - and the hospital could bear the brunt of this cost.

Digital systems allow hospitals to process claims more accurately, and faster. Electronic billing and claim switching means that there is little to no waiting time for claims to be approved.

## **Data driven insight**

Hospitals collect a vast amount of operational data, which, when analysed effectively, can help it streamline, improve customer service and increase profits.

They are able to analyse their data to identify where they are making losses and which areas are most profitable. For example, a hospital may find that its orthopaedic department is under-utilised, and often has empty beds, while its maternity sector may be in demand and oversubscribed. The hospital can then choose to close, or reduce, its orthopaedic department and allocate the beds and space to their maternity wing thereby maximising investments in assets.

Another added benefit of this type of analysis is that it allows a hospital to specialize and differentiate against competitors. An institution could identify a trend for referred patients to their facility for a specific treatment or discipline, highlighting it as a potential specialty. Conversely, it could also show where patients are referred elsewhere, triggering improvement projects. Hospitals known for a particular specialised service tend to attract the best doctors, as well as patients from all geographic regions, purely because of their reputation within that discipline.

Data also offers valuable insights into patient trends and requirements when also used in conjunction with patient survey applications. Hospitals can use this data to identify what patients need and increase their desirability as a service provider choice. That said, even with acclaimed patient care and benefits, many hospitals still find it tricky to attract return patients.

One of the key return pulls for patients - new and returning - is the medical practitioners based at a hospital. Patients tend to go to a specific institution for a specific doctor, or specialist. Hospitals which offer the latest supporting medical and ICT technologies tend to attract the best talent, which raises the hospital's reputation and increases its chances of attracting patients. Reputable doctors attract more patients, and more patients result in more revenue.

The future of healthcare is digital, and private hospitals that invest in technology today will be the ones which stand out as institutions of choice, tomorrow.

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