

How tech is transforming healthcare

We're human. We're programmed for instant gratification. Using this principle, Discovery Health has built its very successful Vitality programme, which is a blueprint for other rewards schemes not only in healthcare, but other sectors too.

 By Nicci Botha 13 Sep 2017



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Free smoothies or wearable tech for doing a daily dose of exercise or changing your eating habits is not just a reward. It's a strategy. Discovery Health being Mr Nice Guy. There is an ulterior motive, albeit a well-intentioned, strategic one. The company is using behaviour modification to build a shared value business model, which is sustainable.

Short-term rewards for long-term gains

It boils down to managing the growing epidemic of lifestyle diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and certain cancers, the estimated cost of this to the global economy is over \$30trn over the next 20 years. Dr Ryan Noach, deputy chief executive officer, Discovery Health, says most non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are modifiable through changing habits such as eating and exercise. "Individual behaviour tends to be irrational. For example, when questioned, 52% of people with up to five NCDs, were inherently optimistic about their health, and had deferred action."

So, in a nutshell, Vitality rewards members today to bend the mortality curve for longer-term risk mitigation he says.

There's been a massive and rising investment in digital healthcare, particularly along three themes, namely telemedicine, enterprise software and business-to-consumer interface, he says.

He touches on telemedicine, but speaks very enthusiastically about the other two themes, probably because of the amount of capital Discovery Health has ploughed into them.

Enterprise software

Fragmentation and a lack of care coordination are costing medical aids. For instance, diagnostic tests are

often repeated in the chain of care. A GP may order a blood test to confirm a diagnosis before referring a patient to a specialist, who will repeat the same test because he or she does not have access to the result of the prior test.

The same goes for providing a medical history. A patient generally has to complete the same paperwork at each practitioner he or she visits, which creates unnecessary admin work. There have also been situations where patients have forgotten to mention information that could have implications on treatment protocols.

So, Discovery Health is developing a centralised electronic medical records platform where practitioners can access patient information (with the patient's permission, of course) and get a full medical history at a touch of a button, he explains.

Business-to-consumer interface

Noach is excited about Discovery Health's new digital healthcare platform, DrConnect, which the company will be launching shortly. This is a predictive artificial intelligence (AI) engine which "glues doctors and patients together and provides contextual and meaningful information. AI is going to change doctors' jobs. It's patient-centric and allows them to manage their own care," he says.

ABOUT NICCI BOTHA

Nicci Botha has been wordsmithing for more than 20 years, covering just about every subject under the sun and then some. She's strung together words on sustainable development, maritime matters, mining, marketing, medical, lifestyle... and that elixir of life - chocolate. Nicci has worked for local and international media houses including Primedia, Caxton, Lloyd's and Reuters. Her new passion is digital media.
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