

Providing proactive care

We speak to Sheetal Shah, Avanade's director of digital health, to find out how new technologies are helping healthcare providers deliver more personalised care

BY REBECCA GIBSON

When patients are seeking treatment options, sometimes identifying the right point of care can be confusing, especially as healthcare providers are launching a number of new healthcare access points. Patients and their caregivers are often left overestimating or underestimating the severity of their symptoms and end up seeking treatment in a non-optimal location.

"Often when we seek healthcare services, we're not in the right mindset so it's imperative that

healthcare providers do everything they can to make the process to identify where one should turn as seamless, quick and worry-free as possible," says Sheetal Shah, director of digital health at Avanade. "Using the wrong option not only wastes a patient's time and delays their treatment, but it also ties up medical resources who are already challenged to manage the demand for their services."

To remedy this, healthcare providers can improve patient access and deliver decision support tools directly to patients, suggests Shah.

"Healthcare providers need to replace their existing static websites populated with read-only data with interactive online experiences that enable patients to engage with clinicians and nurses, book appointments in real time and more," he advises. "Tools such as Microsoft Skype for Business, for example, enable healthcare providers to discuss a patient's symptoms and triage them online before they even leave their house. At the end of the day it's all about bending the cost curve and optimising time and resources for the patient, provider and the health plan."

Avanade is already helping healthcare providers to prepare for the coming age of the digital customer, working with them to create a digital workplace where all employees can engage with patients and their caregivers in between appointments.

"This starts with healthcare providers developing a 360-degree view of each patient, setting a foundation for them to deliver high quality experiences and true population health services, rather than just relying on information gathered during traditional visits," Shah says, adding that some patients go months or years without seeing their doctor. To do this, many organisations are adopting omnichannel strategies, digital marketing platforms and customer relationship management (CRM) systems, such as Microsoft Dynamics CRM. Recently, for example, Avanade



"The only way healthcare providers can deliver a high quality experience is by developing a 360-degree view of each patient "



helped private health insurance provider Bupa Australia develop Know-it, a Microsoft technology-based tool for patient-facing employees to instantly respond to customer enquiries with the right information and in the right context.

This data can be combined with analytics to empower healthcare providers with the insights they need to personalise care and even predict which services, communication and staffing requirements will be necessary to respond to their patients' needs.

"CRM systems connect information from various data silos, enabling providers to orchestrate and engage patients during specific moments in their healthcare journey – be it personalised notes about the flu shot clinic closest to their office, or sending reminders on medications," Shah explains. "Plus, these tools can improve the after-care service by allowing clinicians to complete virtual follow-up appointments to see how patients have responded to treatment. Not only does this reassure patients and their caregivers that they're receiving the best possible care, but it also allows doctors to identify any health issues before they become problems and further tax a strained system."

Health insurance plans are also starting to adopt a proactive approach to service delivery.

"Although many health plans offer value-added services to help improve a customer's overall health and wellbeing, such as discounted gym memberships, they often go unused because they are promoted via one-size-fits-all

messaging," says Shah. "It's crucial that health plans understand the context of each member so they can proactively market the most relevant benefits and deliver the message at the optimal time. Research shows customers who make use of multiple services and enjoy frequent and personalised interactions with their health plan providers are more likely to remain loyal."

Shah adds: "They're also taking inspiration from online retailers and using pattern recognition technology to track their customer's browsing behaviours while on their portal to tailor and highlight content individual users will find most relevant."

Delivering this type of personalised service will also help providers to achieve their other key goal – improving customer experience ratings. "Today I can access quality scores for nearly every hospital and Medicare plan provider in the US via publicly accessible data sources," comments Shah. "Just as e-retailers follow up with their customers, health plans and providers are now proactively asking patients about their experiences, asking what went well and what could be improved."

Ultimately, says Shah, everyone wants the same thing – healthcare that is delivered in the most convenient, personalised and cost-effective way. "At Avanade, we're committed to helping healthcare providers and health plans deploy the technology they need to better understand their customers and achieve that goal of delivering high quality, cost-effective care across their patient population." ◉