

# Redefining Healthcare: Digital Trends in 2021

2020 has redefined healthcare for good. As with many industries, the impact of COVID-19 cannot be understated, as healthcare was placed at the centre of the global agenda. In the same way that in 2020, every company wanting to thrive has had to become a tech company, led by remote working and data, so every company has become a healthcare business; safeguarding people and customers becoming a core business focus.

It's also been a year of rapid acceleration as pharma companies raced to develop the COVID-19 vaccine. Behind the scenes, we've seen pharma leaders develop new strategies to ensure clinical trials stay on track, adapting trial designs and recruitment techniques amongst an increasingly savvy candidate pool to enable a rapid recovery and vitally, get new drugs to market. Meanwhile, frontline healthcare providers innovated "new normal" ways of delivering patient care from digital dashboards through to virtual consultations.

Digital transformation has underpinned every aspect of healthcare this year – from how global teams can collaborate on vaccine projects through to minimising disruption to patient care. In this piece, I'll explore the new trends set to change the landscape of healthcare on 2021.

## Start with Patient Experience

The pandemic has highlighted the need for real consistency in patient experience – and how as a society, we empower more patients to manage their care. With the gap in access to healthcare at the centre of COVID-19, improving patient experience and engagement has become essential. We expect 2021 to bring a renewed commitment to patient experience placed at every touch point of healthcare, redefining this through remote, tele health and m-health technologies to drive engagement throughout their treatment. This in turn will foster more innovation across all areas of healthcare.

## Chatbots Drive Personalised Patient Care

We expect to see more AI-led applications

than ever in 2021. Let's start at the front end with chatbots and digital dashboards, as providers adapt to new ways to deliver healthcare. First off, from an efficiency and admin perspective, they'll increasingly be used to track appointments and contacts alongside monitoring patient activities. Moving into clinical, there's real potential to offer a more personalised patient experience too – medication management, for instance.

## The Move to Virtual Trials

Connected AI and virtual technologies are on track to transform clinical trials too. 2020 highlighted the need for speed, safety, effectiveness and vitally, patient-centricity in trials. And as the industry seeks to bring other trials back into play, cost reduction and increased productivity are more important than ever.

Where AI will come into its own is in the process of patient pre-selection and pre-screening, coupled with the need to make trial enrolment easier for patients. AI and predictive analytics can help us unpack these deeper insights. By understanding key data points such as motivators, previous experiences, even behavioural tendencies, trial owners can weigh the patients most suited, and support recruitment and successful retention. At the same time, AI can filter out existing biases, creating a far more accurate, richer picture.

With these foundational elements at play and the changing trial eco-system, we expect to see more investment in virtual trials coming through next year.

## Virtual Healthcare as the New Normal

The parameters of lockdowns, certainly in the UK, have shaped the way so much patient care is delivered – from GP consultations through to pharmacy check-ins. The number of virtual visits, particularly for minor and routine appointments, has surged during the pandemic; Forrester predicted this is set to hit one billion by the end of the year.

While virtual visits have been driven by necessity, to reduce the risk of infections, this style of remote patient care has driven new levels of efficiencies for frontline medical professionals, and we expect this

to stay in place, well after the pandemic's over.

## A Rise in Mobile Health

Again, the groundswell is gathering pace for mobile healthcare devices, as they continue to revolutionise the face of healthcare, from instant and virtual consultations and diagnosis through to appointment management and medical supplies processes.

Today there are nearly 320,000 mobile health apps in the leading app stores, with 200 new health apps coming to market every day.

It's an empowering move for consumers, looking to take more control of their own health too, be it through fitness, meditation or wellbeing apps. A key employer trend in the wake of lockdowns has been for businesses to partner with mobile health apps to provide their teams with access to wellbeing support. The aforementioned Forrester report cites that during 2021, one third of virtual care appointments will be related to mental health, so ensuring patients have access to resources, tools and support will be essential.

## Integrating Wearable Technology to the Next Level

Tying into m-health are wearables, already gaining real patient attention and transforming the way consumers engage with their healthcare. As with m-health, we expect this to go beyond the fitness, sleep and calorie tracking generally associated with wearables, as they're increasingly integrated with EHRs, and new ways to improve the quality of patient care. The potential to shape preventive action through smart use of devices will be significant, feeding into more sophisticated health solutions, especially as 5G internet is rolled out.

## Next-gen APIs and Interoperability

Secure, efficient data exchanges have been at the centre of effective healthcare, as care is delivered through multiple channels, be it in person or telemedicine. We expect to see next-gen APIs enabling impactful data exchanges between EHR platforms and devices in a more significant way in 2021.



For patients, this means improved accuracy and quicker diagnoses, as well as efficient care plans.

#### **New Levels of Efficiency in Clinical Trials**

Focusing in on clinical trials, there's an industry movement suggesting the end of SDV (source data verification) could be in sight. SDV has long ensured the quality and integrity of data but increasingly, real weaknesses have been identified in terms of quality control, cost and ROI. Also the resource – the healthcare man hours lost to manual transcription and checking of data in an industry as sophisticated as ours, is incongruous at best. We're spending billions of dollars to re-enter and then re-check data that already exists.

Again, COVID-19 has accelerated new questions around the efficacy of SDV, not least due to the challenges around placing monitors onsite to manage data. As more sophisticated alternatives emerge, we expect to see a rise in digihealth applications that enhance the interoperability of EHR and supporting research applications, EDC (electronic data capture) for example. This new level of efficiency will drive a paradigm

shift in clinical research, reducing costs and freeing up staff resources.

#### **Deliver Faster Patient Recruitment with Technology**

Another clinical trial-focused trend is the transformation of patient recruitment strategies via a data-led approach. Let's think about how the potential of electronic health records (EHRs) here; 70% of clinical studies data can be found in patient records, but the process remains primarily manual. The previously untapped sources of eligible patients open up larger and new patient pools. And, with pre-screening, you have even more control over the final patient recruitment process. Using this data resource smartly gives trial managers a multi-layered understanding of patients supporting a more predictable trial outcome and manages costs.

2021 will see more in remote, data-driven approaches, more automation, more efficient study delivery. Additional benefits include allowing for greater levels of safety and more accurate forecasting. Because bottlenecks are minimised too, trials start quicker, delivering valid results faster – essential in a post COVID-19 world.

2020 has changed the face of healthcare. And digital transformation is enabling growth in the delivery of faster, better quality options, revolutionising how patients engage in and access their healthcare. And with increased personalisation and greater efficiencies, this supports the collective goal of ensuring that patient experience always comes first.

For more information:  
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