

Care Transformation Dispatch: 2022

Executive insights on healthcare's digital paradigm shift

For years healthcare has lagged other industries when it comes to the adoption of digital technologies designed to support stickier consumer relationships. Healthcare organizations have long been focused on iterative, EHR-based tweaks to improve wait times or symptom checkers. Meanwhile, tech giants have been transforming consumer expectations by delivering truly personalized experiences. As these companies look to play a bigger role in the healthcare ecosystem, it's past time for traditional healthcare players to make true digital transformation a priority.

The pandemic has forced hospitals and health systems to rapidly integrate new technologies and engage with patients outside the four walls of the hospital. The pace of this technology adoption has highlighted the potential for a massive paradigm shift in care delivery and undermined misconceptions about the power of technology to expand care, improve workflows and meet patients where they are. The bottom line: Healthcare's digital transformation has finally arrived, but it is far from over.

To discuss these trends, *Becker's Hospital Review* and b.well® Connected Health — a healthcare technology company committed to transforming care — assembled a handful of hospital and health system executives for an advisory call. The conversation took place at the end of 2021 and also included participation from b.well® Connected Health's founder and CEO Kristen Valdes. The following content is based on this conversation.

Digital transformation defined; It's about winning and retaining more patients for your system

The industry-wide discourse about the rise of healthcare technology solutions has solidified the phrase "digital transformation" as one of the industry's buzzwords. While buzzwords and clichés can be valuable for framing

conversations, they are also vague and can contribute to confusion. According to a chief medical informatics officer for a large integrated health network serving 135 towns on the East Coast, establishing common language around technology initiatives is important but all such initiatives should be tied to measurable goals to engender teamwide focus and cooperation.

"Every time we embed new technology, we do it in a way that is disciplined and meant to achieve a specific goal," the CMIO said. "To do that, you have to be able to innovate quickly and set up the right technology infrastructure."

The vice president of strategy for an academic health system in the South agreed with the CMIO's approach. "We're not talking about technology for technology's sake, we're talking about technology with a purpose," he said. "It's about getting individuals into your system, nurturing them and supporting whatever their needs are. It comes back around to the individual patient."

EHR and digital front door solutions are not a digital transformation strategy

The purpose of healthcare's digital transformation is to make care more personalized for patients amid growing competition. At the same time, a technology solution won't be adopted widely if it complicates providers' workflows. The physician experience needs to be streamlined. Tools like the EHR and digital front door solutions are part of transformation strategies but are not themselves drivers of meaningful change — technology is the means; better care is the end.

"Let's just call it what it is," said the vice president of digital engagement for a large East Coast health system that employs more than 7,000 physicians. "Digital transformation is all of us trying to figure out a way to deliver better care."

Cultivate a culture of urgency; New competitors are more consumer-savvy

The levels of disruption seen in the healthcare industry in 2021 are expected to persist throughout the remainder of 2022. Globally, the healthcare industry saw \$44 billion in innovation investments in 2021. The massive influx of funds was partly driven by investment from tech and consumer companies, according to the [World Economic Forum](#).

The large tech entrants disrupting healthcare are the same organizations that have given rise to the modern consumer experience — these companies have the edge over traditional healthcare players when it comes to the personalization of the patient experience. While hospitals and health systems have the advantage of established healthcare infrastructure, that alone may not be enough for many organizations to withstand heightened competition from tech giants and retail pharmacy.

Traditional providers must act fast to meet the urgency of this moment. Unfortunately, many forward-looking leaders are up against organizational cultures adverse to change. As the clinical lead for the digital health office of a major academic health system in the Southwest with more than 50 hospitals put it: “Our digital health office struggled for quite a while because if we put things to a vote and get 99 ‘yesses’ and one ‘no,’ then it’s a ‘no.’”

For hospitals and health systems to meet the challenge of intensifying competition, they must abandon the rigid processes of the past, embrace change and act fast.

Ace the fundamentals: a digital transformation mindset

- Adopt a Consumer Mindset and reset processes and patient touchpoints
- Become digital-first as the default to force addressing what is easy and hard for maximum benefit
- Prioritize data: collection from core operating systems and patient’s sources/apps and tools, aggregating, analyzing for insights on a proactive basis.

“When you start with the fundamentals, you’ll see immediate financial impacts and it will help get everyone on board.”

Kristen Valdes, CEO of b.well Connected Health





The power of partnership and a culture of innovation

When digital technologies are leveraged in meaningful, goal-oriented ways, the real-world benefits for patients and healthcare organizations can be profound. With the right tools and strategies, providers can improve patient loyalty, fortify their brand in the marketplace, improve outcomes and drive better financial results. For example, one of b.well's partners was able to reduce patient no-show rates to 2 percent (versus industry average of 14-25%) through the integration of an automated scheduling system that allowed patients to take control of their own appointment times.

For digital transformation efforts to yield long-term success, initiatives must be embraced from the bedside to the c-suite. Support from the top and buy-in at the clinician level is essential, according to the clinical lead from the large academic health system in the Southwest. "We successfully transformed our medical group in the last year, and this transformation started at the top with our CEO," he said. "From there we looked to empower teams at the local level. Everyone is empowered to solve problems and further transformation. Digital technology is baked in to those efforts."

“Everyone is empowered to solve problems and further transformation. Digital technology is baked in to those efforts.”

Clinical lead from a large academic health system in the Southwest

According to the chief digital transformation officer from an East Coast health system with more than 300 care sites, organizational alignment can be supported by establishing early goals, achieving those swiftly and building out from there. "Start small, get some wins and show people how this can work," he said. "You also need to implement these transformations in a way that alleviates some of the burdens they're facing. If you do that, it will create demand for transformation inside the organization."

Ms. Valdes encouraged organizations to keep the consumer at the center of all transformation efforts. "From a healthcare perspective, consumers really want two things," she said. "They want you to be there for them when they need you and they want you to tell them when they need to take action."

**“It all comes down to trust.
And it’s up to us to build it.”**

b.well® Connected Health’s founder and CEO Kristen Valdes

Technology partners can help providers establish and maintain consumer centricity. However, Ms. Valdes cautioned providers to be wary of vendors offering one-size-fits-all solutions. "No two health systems we work with have the exact same priorities and objectives," she said. "Providers should look for platforms and solutions that are intelligent enough to speed up the transition to more consumer-centric services but are flexible enough to be modified as technology improves, as partners change and as business models adapt."

Just as it’s up to providers to cultivate trust with patients, vendors must establish trust with provider partners. "It all comes down to trust," Ms. Valdes said. "And it’s up to us to build it." ●

b.well Learn more at www.icanbwell.com

