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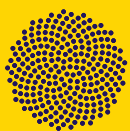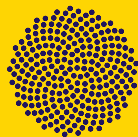# Where Digital Health Thrives
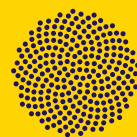
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Improving health outcomes

Michael Strübin, Director of Digital Health at MedTech Europe, talks about the development of digital health solutions and how this is transforming healthcare.

MedTech Europe includes members from more than 100 national, European and multinational corporations and more than 45 medical technology associations. It represents the industry in discussions with policymakers and relevant stakeholders to strengthen the sector's position and achieve its vision in strategic growth areas such as data-driven healthcare.

"The changing digital landscape is an opportunity for the healthcare sector. Those that embrace this change can better position themselves to benefit from it."

For example, digital health and data can improve access to healthcare by empowering patients to make better decisions about their own conditions, using digital health tools.

" **The data generated by medical technologies can improve health outcomes and make health systems much more efficient.** "

The digital transformation of health

Michael says that digital health can make healthcare better, safer, and more efficient. But this digital transformation also has socio-economic benefits.

"No country in Europe can say they have sufficient numbers of health care professionals, or guarantee that they will not have a workforce supply problem in future" says Michael. "Digital health can help automate many tasks to take this pressure off the workforce to help them focus on more specialist activities. For example, many routine healthcare tasks could be automated. A patient with diabetes could simply send their data to the doctor instead of having to visit the office or the hospital, thus saving time for both the patient and the health system. Algorithms can analyse data and scan for anomalies, only triggering an alert when a healthcare professional should intervene."

But there are many challenges to a digital evolution such as this. For example, the lack of investments has become a major obstacle to digital health in areas such as robotic surgeries or artificial intelligence (AI).

Member states have their own national and regional healthcare systems and models for financing or reimbursing doctors or hospitals for a service. So how do you fit digital health technologies into that? How are you going to assess their value and reimburse them?

Healthcare professionals may also not have the digital skills required to integrate new digital tools into their routine. But one of the biggest barriers is the lack of access to data. If you have a fitness tracker, for example, your data is stored on their server and no one else can access it. How do we access that data, and how can a person even share it with their doctor?"

Covid-19 and recommendations for the future

The medtech industry has made significant efforts on various fronts to help manage the Covid-19 pandemic in Europe. While providing essential solutions like testing and personal protective equipment, the industry has observed developments in digital health and proposes a vision for digital health technologies.

MedTech Europe engages with policymakers and it has set out specific recommendations to improve the future of healthcare, deliver a sustainable recovery and ensure economic resilience.

The first recommendation that Michael highlights is to build on the Covid-19 digital health momentum, "Underlying and underpinning the momentum on digital health have been national regulatory steps to enable digital health technologies, including amending rules requiring face to face interactions between healthcare professionals (HCPs) and patients, and extending or expanding funding/reimbursement for teleconsultations. The way forward would be for these measures to be kept in place and built upon

"We also need to advance the European Health Data Space", Michael adds. Before the pandemic, digital health deployment, and sharing health data, has faced legal, technical, commercial and socio-cultural and skills barriers. Addressing these requires leadership and commitment from all sectors. The European Health Data Space project, alongside funding and investment programmes like Horizon Europe and Digital Europe, reflects a commitment to address these barriers and support it with financial resources.

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However, he warns that it is not enough, "We need the right incentives to ensure the development of digital health solutions and reimbursement policies to make sure that they are adopted. The rise of telehealth services during the pandemic showed the critical factor of reimbursement provisions. Europe's public healthcare systems are responsible for the bulk of healthcare spend. Unlocking these resources for digital health technologies has been slow, but with the right policies we could better ensure health system resilience."

Lastly, Michael advises that we need new models for developing and deploying AI. "The mid- and long-term recovery of the European economy will require a more comprehensive approach towards healthcare that reduces inefficiencies, improves access to healthcare for all, alleviates the burden on the workforce, and empowers patients. AI in healthcare can significantly impact all these issues if barriers are addressed at European and member state level."

Ireland's position in Europe and beyond

Michael says Ireland, in particular, has been very successful in the medical technology sector and will continue to be a bright spark in the Europe-wide market. More people are employed per capita in the medtech industry in Ireland than any other European country, and it has a high-ranking education sector. Furthermore, after the departure of the UK from the EU, Ireland as an active member state remains active in shaping the European data governance regime and the European Health Data Space, as well as in the European Single Market, thus reaping the benefits of being part of an economic block of more than 400 million people.

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