BioSpectrum
the business of Bio & Health Sciences
ASIA EDITION

Novel, agile & omnichannel approach from pharma companies can structure a futuristic healthcare system

September 14, 2020 | Opinion

Mr Dinesh Sampath Rangaraj, Frost & Sullivan, APAC region, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia has more to share on the prospective opportunities at the pharma industry to emerge from the COVID-19 crisis.



The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the traditional business models of companies. While digital transformation has been part of the pharmaceutical industry, typically it has been a slow progress in adoption and implementation of digital transformation initiatives.

Access to doctors has been impacted significantly both for the pharmaceutical sales and also for physician's access to patients due to the pandemic. A survey by IQVIA shows that there has been 74% decrease in in-patient visits, 36% reduction in patient referrals, 29% delay in diagnosis and 28% postponement of surgeries in the first 3 months of year 2020.

Pharmaceutical companies have been at the forefront in supporting the healthcare industry to focus on the immediate crisis, however it is an opportunity for companies to have a holistic approach towards servicing the healthcare industry through a

patient-centric model. The top priorities for the pharmaceutical companies is to ensure that the patients are able to get access to their physicians for consultation and prescription, consistent delivery of drugs, monitoring of patients outside clinical settings.

New age tech start-ups are enabling the healthcare industry to adapt to the new normal and meeting the needs of the healthcare industry through digital enablement. There are several telemedicine platform companies in South East Asia that have witnessed a surge in the number of subscribers as well as consultations. It was estimated that these companies, which include Doctor Anywhere, MyDoc, Halodoc, Alodoctor witnessed more than 100% increase in the number of users and have been working with public health authorities to extend healthcare access and services to patients during the on-going pandemic. It is not just the start-ups but also the insurance companies such as AIA, AXA, and Prudential that have partnered with hospitals and telemedicine companies to offer healthcare services and medicines to its customers.

Though the telemedicine platforms may not offset the in-person interactions, but pharmaceutical companies could potentially leverage these partnerships to design a new Omni-channel approach to serve patients moving beyond just digital marketing initiatives.

It is critical for companies to adopt the following best practices before embarking on an Omni-channel approach.

1. **Segmentation** – Assess various customers segments for their behavior, needs and expectations in the new normal. Not all the customers will be ready to move to the new interactive approach hence there is a need to assess the maturity level and develop a staged approach to address the needs through new approach/model.
2. **Services** – Map out the new physician and patient journey during the pandemic and develop post-pandemic scenarios and their implications. Design and develop the portfolio of services/solutions based on the new journey and the touch points that are critical.
3. **Structure** – Follow the segmentation and the services steps to design the structure of the organization that can deliver to the customers. If required, restructure teams that can be aligned by brand and therapeutic areas to customer segments. Focus on partnerships with existing digital platform companies in the market to develop a modular and flexible solution.
4. **Scale** - A key challenge of healthcare companies that adopt digital technology to provide services and solutions has been the ability to scale. Pharmaceutical companies have to align their value propositions to the needs of the market – access to new patients, address challenges due to access or affordability, enable remote diagnosis and increase physician and patient education. Customizing the partnerships based on geography and the country landscape can enable companies to drive penetration and scale.

The current situation offers multiple opportunities for pharmaceutical companies to combine both the traditional and the digital approach towards serving the customer. However, companies have to adopt an agile approach and execution is the key to success in moving to a digital and an Omni-channel approach.