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Healthcare in the post-COVID era: accessible, rapid and tech-driven

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"In Asia, digital health services are expected to create up to $100 billion in value by 2025, up from $37 billion in 2020", explains Sunny Rao, SVP, Global Sales of Vonage (Singapore)



The permanent shift in consumer preferences, rising expectations for enhanced customer experiences (CX) and digital transformation, driven by COVID-19, have boosted the popularity of telehealth services. Globally, consumer uptake of telehealth services has increased 38 times from the pre-COVID-19 baseline and now impacts more than a billion lives. In Asia, digital health services are expected to create up to $100 billion in value by 2025, up from $37 billion in 2020.

Vonage's 10th Global Customer Engagement Report showed that 46 percent of Asia Pacific consumers increased their use of digital channels (including calls, text, video and social channels) to engage with healthcare providers. In the next 6-12 months, more than 50 percent expect to maintain this level of engagement while 38 percent expect it to increase further. Consumers who embraced new channels of communication during the pandemic are not reverting back to old habits.

Telehealth offered a bridge to care at the start of the pandemic. Now, it continues to play a key role in alleviating challenges in existing healthcare systems and fulfilling the rising demand for better CX. Telehealth solutions offer healthcare providers the chance to reinvent the virtual and hybrid care models to enhance healthcare access, patient outcomes and service affordability - an urgent need in the post COVID world.

Video consultations are the new normal

The use of video communications in healthcare has increased significantly. Globally, consumers are using video chat to connect with healthcare services 50 percent more today than they were during the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020. Beyond the pandemic, it is being used today to improve patients' access to healthcare, especially in archipelago nations like Indonesia and the Philippines, and in rural areas where medical infrastructure and services are less available.

Insung Information, a leading healthcare solutions firm in Korea, embedded Video APIs within its telehealth devices (HiCare Hub, HiCare and HiCare Home Doctor), equipping doctors to teleconsult with patients through a browser or application on a PC, laptop, or mobile device. Chang Yoon Lee, General Manager of the Healthcare Business Division, Insung Information, acknowledged how the pandemic has shown an immense need for telemedicine services in Korea. He believes that high video quality, along with security and ease of use, is essential for the changed telemedicine market.

These events cover a wide range of activities beyond healthcare, from exercise classes and talks on healthy living to games, entertainment, and virtual social gatherings, and can be experienced on any device.

AI-enabled telehealth services gain momentum

Advanced technologies like AI are also solving many challenges in today's healthcare sector. AI-enabled cloud communications help healthcare providers maintain excellent patient care and improve efficiencies while keeping frontline workers safe. It enables doctors and nurses to deliver rapid responses and offer a higher level of medical attention to patients that need critical care and have a short time window for treatment.

One such example is, Taiwan-based Chi Mei Hospital using the Vonage Voice API to alert its medical staff of critical emergencies that need to be addressed extremely quickly; for example, ST-segment elevation myocardial infarction (STEMI), a very serious type of heart attack. When staff on duty detect a case of STEMI, they press an alert button on their mobile device, triggering a Vonage-enabled text-to-speech voice alert to the mobile phones of the cardiologist and cardiac catheter staff on call. The practitioners can then rush to administer life-saving treatment to the patient. With this, the average "wait time" for critical treatment decreased by 10 minutes, and hospital staff productivity increased by 10-15 percent.

Enhanced workflows at contact centers

Another area where digital communication tools are offering great benefits is contact centers. Digital solutions, particularly AI, are especially important for healthcare facilities that are struggling to manage an increase in patient volumes.

Customer service voicebots, for instance, can answer customers' questions or even provide step-by-step instructions to resolve issues. Voice assistants can help schedule appointments, make calls or route patients to the best-skilled doctors or nurses, send SMS messages, and even translate voicemails to text.

They also offer AI-enabled insights on patient prescriptions and medication adherence. The technology can easily understand complex interactions between a healthcare provider and patient and visualise the effectiveness of patient, sales, and marketing programmes.

Telehealth, a robust option for care

According to McKinsey, consumers embraced five years' worth of digital adoption just eight weeks into the pandemic. This rapid adoption proves that there is a silver lining to the pandemic, after all, democratising the use of telehealth in Asia's healthcare sector, which had seen little innovation in the past.

Telehealth services appear poised to remain a robust option for care. As continuous innovations and the latest technologies, especially those powered by AI, become available, the immense potential exists for healthcare providers to further improve access, quality and affordability of healthcare and tap into telehealth's $100 billion market opportunity.