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Revolutionizing Healthcare with AI: Transforming Delivery, Access, and Equity

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In conversation with Dr Nelson Lau, CEO and Co-Founder, HealthBridge AI Exploring how AI is addressing physician burnout, empowering patients, and bridging gaps in healthcare infrastructure across the APAC region.



The integration of AI in the biomedical and healthcare industry is revolutionizing how care is delivered, managed, and personalized. From streamlining administrative tasks like electronic health record (EHR) documentation to enabling proactive, patient-centric care through AI-driven applications, this technology is addressing long-standing challenges such as physician burnout, documentation burdens, and limited access to quality care in underserved regions. AI tools are not only reducing the administrative burden on physicians—allowing them to focus more on patient interaction—but are also empowering individuals to take greater control of their health through personalized care applications that integrate biometric data and IoT devices.

These innovations are particularly impactful in regions with limited resources, such as Cambodia, where AI can act as a "democratizer" of medical knowledge, supporting less-trained doctors and improving care accessibility. AI offers opportunities to bridge gaps in infrastructure, data accessibility, and medical training. However, the diverse technological and regulatory landscapes across the APAC region present unique challenges, requiring startups to tailor their strategies for scalability and governments to invest in interoperable systems and anonymized health data sharing. As AI continues to evolve, its potential to transform healthcare into a more efficient, equitable, and preventive system is immense, provided it is developed responsibly and guided by collaboration between startups, healthcare providers, and regulatory bodies.

In a recent interview with Biospectrum Asia, **Dr Nelson Lau, CEO and Co-Founder, HealthBridge AI** navigated key aspects regarding how AI is transforming healthcare delivery, the role of startups in navigating these changes, and the broader implications for creating efficient, equitable, and impactful healthcare systems in a rapidly evolving landscape.

1. **How are digital tools, such as AI diagnostics and personalized care apps, transforming healthcare delivery beyond traditional hospital settings?**

Digital tools are fundamentally changing how healthcare is delivered by moving care outside the confines of traditional hospital settings. Tools like AI diagnostics and personalized care applications are enabling doctors and patients to interact more efficiently and meaningfully. For instance, in Southeast Asia, including Hong Kong, doctors are often overwhelmed by administrative tasks such as paperwork and forms, which leaves them with limited time to focus on patients. This administrative burden forces them to prioritize bureaucratic requirements over the personal connection that is essential for effective care.

AI-driven tools, such as AI scribes, are addressing this issue by automating administrative processes, allowing doctors to save time and redirect their focus toward patient engagement. These tools are part of a broader AI revolution in the health tech industry, which is characterized by rapid adoption across various domains. For example, 30% of general practitioners in Australia adopted AI scribes within just two years—an adoption rate that far outpaces earlier technologies. This revolution extends beyond administrative efficiency to areas like therapeutics, drug discovery, and clinical decision support. Such advancements are not only improving care delivery but also opening new possibilities for innovation in how healthcare is conceptualized and delivered in non-traditional settings.

2. How do you define the latest AI revolution in the health tech industry?

The latest AI revolution in health tech is defined by its speed, scale, and impact across multiple facets of the industry. Healthcare has become one of the fastest sectors to embrace AI, with adoption rates that were previously unthinkable. For instance, the rapid integration of AI scribes in Australia—where 30% of general practitioners adopted the technology within two years—demonstrates how quickly the industry is evolving.

This revolution is not limited to administrative tasks. It is transforming areas like therapeutics, where AI is used to identify new drug candidates, and clinical decision support, where AI provides doctors with insights to improve care quality. Additionally, AI is enabling entirely new workflows, such as remote monitoring and AI-driven diagnostics, which allow healthcare professionals to deliver care more proactively.

Our own work reflects this trend. At HealthBridge AI, we are developing a patient-facing application that combines AI with IoT devices and biometric data to provide doctors with a comprehensive view of a patient's health over time. This approach exemplifies how AI is not just improving existing systems but also creating entirely new paradigms for care delivery. The AI revolution is about more than efficiency—it is about reimagining what is possible in healthcare.

3. How can AI contribute to creating a more efficient, equitable, and impactful healthcare system that benefits doctors, patients, and healthcare organizations alike?

AI has the potential to make healthcare systems more efficient, equitable, and impactful by addressing key pain points for all stakeholders. For doctors, AI reduces the administrative burden, allowing them to focus on what matters most—patient care. For example, our clinical co-pilot functionality analyzes consultations to provide decision support and identify missed actions, helping doctors deliver better outcomes.

For patients, AI-driven tools like personalized care applications empower them to take a more active role in their health. These tools can integrate IoT devices and biometric data to track health metrics over time, giving patients and doctors a more holistic understanding of their well-being. This shift toward preventive and patient-centric care can reduce the strain on healthcare systems by addressing issues before they become critical.

Equity is another critical aspect. In regions like Cambodia, where medical training and resources may be limited, AI tools can act as a "democratizer" of medical knowledge. By supporting non-English-speaking and lower-socioeconomic-status countries, we aim to provide tools that help less-trained doctors improve their practice. While the technology is currently more accessible to private hospitals due to cost, we are working on partnerships with government organizations and NGOs to subsidize costs for public hospitals. Over time, as AI becomes more affordable, we aim to expand access further, ensuring that the benefits of AI are not limited to wealthier regions or populations.

4. How does the growing burden of electronic records and documentation impact primary care practices among physicians, and what role can AI play in addressing this challenge?

The growing burden of electronic health records (EHRs) and documentation has become a significant challenge for primary care physicians. Doctors often spend more time on administrative tasks than on direct patient care, which not only leads to burnout but also reduces the quality of care. In many cases, physicians are forced to choose between completing paperwork and engaging with patients, which compromises the personal connection that is so crucial for effective care.

AI can play a transformative role in addressing this challenge. By automating routine tasks like transcribing, summarizing, and organizing patient records, AI tools can free up doctors' time and mental energy. Our HealthBridge AI system, for example, integrates with EHRs in two ways: as an external tool for manual use or as a deeply embedded feature within existing systems. This integration allows doctors to perform tasks like recording, summarizing, and letter writing with a single button press, without needing additional logins or interfaces.

However, the challenge of interoperability remains. While AI can streamline documentation within a single system, the lack of seamless communication between different EHR platforms—especially across public and private healthcare systems—limits its full potential. For instance, a patient's private specialist records might not be accessible in a public hospital system, and vice versa. Resolving this issue will require greater openness from governments and healthcare organizations to adopt standardized, interoperable systems that allow AI tools to function across platforms.

5. How do you perceive personalized care applications empowering individuals while reducing strain on the healthcare system?

Personalized care applications have the potential to empower individuals by giving them greater control over their health while simultaneously reducing the strain on healthcare systems. These applications allow patients to monitor their health using IoT devices and biometric data, providing a continuous stream of information that can be shared with healthcare providers. This not only helps patients make informed decisions about their health but also enables doctors to deliver more targeted and proactive care.

For example, at HealthBridge AI we have developed a patient-facing application designed to provide a comprehensive picture of a patient's health over time by integrating data from wearable devices and other sources. This approach shifts the focus from reactive care—treating illnesses after they occur—to preventive care, where potential issues are identified and addressed early.

However, the proliferation of AI-driven health apps also presents challenges. Not all apps are validated or effective, and some can even be dangerous, particularly in sensitive areas like mental health. This underscores the need for responsible development and regulation of AI tools. Doctors will also play a critical role in guiding patients toward trustworthy solutions, ensuring that the apps they use are safe and evidence-based.

7. What is your technical advice for scaling innovation, particularly expanding beyond borders?

Scaling innovation, especially across borders, requires a strategic focus on distribution. Startups must move beyond inefficient methods like door-to-door outreach or relying solely on small business partnerships. Instead, they should identify reputable partners with robust businesses that can support "one-to-many" scaling efforts. This approach ensures that a product or solution can reach a wider audience without being limited by the startup's own resources.

However, scaling across the APAC region presents unique challenges due to the diversity of technologies and platforms used in different countries. For instance, Cambodia relies on Telegram for communication, Singapore uses WhatsApp, and Korea uses KakaoTalk. These differences make it difficult to implement standardized scaling strategies. To address this, startups must tailor their approaches to the specific needs and preferences of each market.

Governments can also play a role in facilitating scaling by being more open to anonymizing and sharing population health data. This would enable startups and enterprises to collaborate more effectively and develop solutions that address regional health challenges. For example, if governments provided access to anonymized health data, startups could use this information to create tools that are both locally relevant and globally scalable.

8. What advice would you give to entrepreneurs or startup companies based on your experience, particularly on how to effectively scale their innovation within the ecosystem?

My top advice to entrepreneurs is to prioritize networking. Before I became an entrepreneur, I didn't fully appreciate how powerful networking could be. However, I now realize that networking is one of the most valuable tools for scaling innovation.

When you network effectively—by presenting yourself well, explaining your work clearly, and building genuine connections—you open the door to opportunities that might not have existed otherwise. In addition to networking, entrepreneurs should focus on finding the right distribution channels. Smaller businesses or direct outreach methods are not sufficient for scaling. Instead, identify a reputable partner with a robust business that can help you scale "one-to-many." This approach allows you to grow efficiently and sustainably.

For APAC countries specifically, I would recommend implementing national electronic health record (EHR) systems as a centralized solution to improve data accessibility. However, even advanced countries like Australia have taken over a decade and billions of dollars to develop such systems, and they are still not fully synchronized. This highlights the need for governments to invest in infrastructure that supports innovation while also being open to collaboration with startups and enterprises.

Finally, entrepreneurs should embrace the challenges of navigating diverse regulatory landscapes. In the APAC region, each country has its own system, with some being highly regulated and others progressing toward stricter standards. While this complexity can be daunting, it also presents an opportunity for startups to differentiate themselves by being agile and adaptable. Larger companies often find this complexity too burdensome, which gives smaller, more nimble startups a competitive edge.

Hithaishi Bhaskar