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Apps and devices pave way to better healthcare'

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Singapore: Throughout the world, governments are grappling with the growing challenge of providing quality, affordable healthcare. Increasingly, they're turning to technology for the solution. In 2015, a number of key technology trends will help shape the healthcare sector in Singapore, from wearable devices and an increased use of analytics to digital and mobile health initiatives.

Wearable devices are expected to become even more popular, offering new opportunities for patient care. Ultimately, these sensor-enabled devices can help revolutionise how medical professionals keep track of a patient's vital health information. Aided by health apps, they allow data on an individual's vital signs to be fed remotely to healthcare providers, thus potentially minimising the need for a physical trip to the doctor.

As Singapore's consumers grow more tech-savvy, we are also seeing a growth in other kinds of digital health initiatives. Some, like telehealth facilities, can allow for a better quality of elderly care - here, rather than requiring patients to travel long distances to receive care, doctors can confer with them remotely in order to provide care and advice.

At the same time, doctors now have access to Singapore's National Electronic Health Record (NEHR) system, which pulls together the medical information of anyone who has ever been a patient at a public sector healthcare facility. Then there's the Consolidated Healthcare Cloud, or 'H-Cloud' initiative, which is slated to provide instant access to patient records among public health institutions by 2017. By sharing patient data across the nation's healthcare ecosystem in these ways, Singapore

is allowing for a better quality of care for patients, and more informed decision-making on the part of its healthcare professionals.

Building analytics competency is one way for healthcare organisations to harness this torrent of new data. Hospitals can make use of analytics for automating decision-making, optimising processes, identifying fraudulent activity, and much more. Analytics can thus provide the mechanism to help Singapore's healthcare organisations deliver the improved outcomes and better value required by market dynamics and today's more demanding consumer.

Boosting the sector: recommendations for policymakers

Singapore's health system is lauded internationally for its ability to achieve outstanding health outcomes based on relatively low national spending. In fact, Bloomberg recently ranked the city-state as the country with the most efficient healthcare system in the world.

It has also been remarkably forward-thinking in terms of supporting innovations in healthcare technologies, through various programmes such as the Economic Development Board (EDB) and Ministry of Health's joint work on establishing a Health & Wellness Program Office (HWPO). HWPO brings together healthcare industry players to collaborate, co-innovate and test-bed healthcare solutions that seek to address key challenges in the country's healthcare system.

Yet while other countries in the region can. and do, look up to Singapore as a model of efficiency in terms of the way it addresses healthcare needs, more can be done. Just as the Monetary Authority of Singapore recently implemented guidelines to safeguard the financial sector's critical IT infrastructure, similar efforts can be made in the healthcare sector. As the nation's healthcare system becomes increasingly connected, it will be imperative for regulatory authorities to safeguard the critical infrastructure 'heart' to keep the pulse of the healthcare system going strong.