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The promise of Digital Health

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The promise of Digital Health



Singapore: One of the hottest topics on the horizon in the today's healthcare industry is **Digital Health**, but what does that term mean exactly? According to the Digital Health Institute, "Digital Health is an upcoming discipline that involves the use of information and communication technologies to help address the health problems and challenges we all face." This definition implies a promise that technology will improve healthcare - just as society has benefitted from technology in many others aspects of life. Are we on the dawn of a new age in healthcare?

Speaking to ***BioSpectrum Asia*** Mr Alden Zecha, CFO and Strategist, Sproxil, highlighted that digital health offers a lot of promise in shaping the healthcare sector.

Q. What, in your opinion has been the breakthrough digital health technology in the world?

A. Great question - there have been very innovative digital health technology breakthroughs across a broad spectrum of healthcare sectors that should be part of this dialogue.

Here are a few examples:
In the area of diagnosis, we saw a major technological breakthrough in ophthalmology: a special lens was developed that works with mobile phones to enable doctors to remotely examine patients' eyes in order to determine what prescription lens are required to help them with vision problems. This capability helps get glasses to people who otherwise may not have access to them.

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In the sphere of treatment, very interesting innovations have been developed to enable mobile phones to transmit medical scans, such as MRI's. This technology enables doctors and specialists who are far away to gain access to data on a patient's condition. They make recommendations on how to treat patients based on transmitted files and local doctors can carry out treatment under the remote doctor's guidance and direction.

Another significant breakthrough in prevention is the use of SMS messaging to communicate with consumers or patients. This is what Sproxil does. Our technology - Mobile Product AuthenticationÃ?Â - was developed to identify and protect consumers from counterfeit products. When purchasing medication, consumers scratch a special security label, revealing a one-time use code, and then text the code to a secure number provided on the package. The text message is processed to determine if the

drug is genuine, counterfeit or stolen. Within seconds, the consumer is notified, via text, of the result. To further reduce access barriers, consumers can also leverage the solution through our mobile app, on our website, and through our call center.

Q. How has this industry mushroomed in the last few years?

A. It has virtually exploded. Five years ago when we launched Sproxil, most people were just beginning to realize the potential of mobile or digital technology to help treat patients and deliver medical care. Now it's one of the fastest growing start-up categories in healthcare - not only in post-industrialized countries, but also in developing regions around the world.

The United States and India, in particular, are hot beds for start-ups using mobile or digital devices - and the level of interest is enormous. Underscoring the point: there are now specific venture capital funds springing up that focus exclusively on the emergence of mobile or digital health technology.

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Q. How stringent are the regulations for this new industry of digital/smart healthcare?

A. It varies significantly from market to market. But, in general there currently are very few regulations specific to digital health. However traditional regulations for healthcare still apply in the digital world. Regulators are playing catch-up to eradicate this void, as existing regulations can hinder the development and application of digital solutions.

For example, regulations requiring paper-based records need to be updated. Paper-based record keeping was a very good requirement - it ensured there were accurate records being kept, but this requirement is not applicable to a digital documentation methodology.

Q. How has your company managed to overcome competition in this space?

A. We have developed a culture of high quality as a significant component in demonstrating our differentiation from competitive challenges. Both in delivering products and services for today's market, as well as maintaining a commitment to high quality in developing solutions for future needs and applications. Conversely, poor quality, ineffective products and unreliable delivery can lead to patient suffering while permitting counterfeiters to grow their foothold in the marketplace.

Quality also relates to security. For example, Sproxil's IT systems are completely cloud-based, so there is no need to access client servers or install software in client IT systems, which significantly mitigates the risk of security breaches and other types of data hacking.

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Another major advantage is that all our technology R&D is conducted in-house, by our employees in the United States - not having to outsource or use contractors is a major advantage.

We have also been able to build a strong reputation in the marketplace through the strength of partnerships and recognition for our achievements. Recently, Sproxil won the "Patents for Humanity" Award from the US Department of Commerce; was ranked #1 in healthcare and #7 overall in Fast Company Magazine's 2013 World's 50 Most Innovative Companies; and received the Schwab Foundation's 2014 Social Entrepreneur of the Year award. Sproxil was also honored in a White House Ceremony for Immigrant Innovators "Champions of Change" designation in 2013. Sproxil has been featured in esteemed journals such as The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, CNN, Reuters, Bloomberg News Network and Fast Company.

Q. Have the consumers in the world become smarter about healthcare choices and improving technology in this space?

A. Absolutely. Consumers are becoming more and more educated on technological improvements and the opportunities it opens for them. Even less-literate consumers in emerging markets are learning about and utilizing health technology solutions. Improved digital health is having a "democratizing" effect on healthcare delivery. The public is much more aware of digital healthcare solutions and associated benefits - improved access, convenience and cost - which is driving demand. This is especially true with free or very inexpensive services like Sproxil.

Q. Give us your perspective on Digital Healthcare policies in India and around the globe.

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A. India is already a global leader in digital healthcare and it continues to push the envelope in terms of leadership and policy development. We look forward to continuing to grow digital healthcare both globally as well as with our teams and offices in India.

Sproxil is a social enterprise that provides brand protection and mobile marketing services in high growth markets. Its flagship Mobile Product Authentication solution helps ensure goods are not counterfeit or compromised, empowering consumers to verify product genuineness by SMS, mobile app, web, or voice. Compatible with any tangible item, MPA is widely used by leading pharmaceutical companies to curb the multi-billion dollar counterfeit drug industry. Headquartered in Cambridge, Mass. (USA) Sproxil has offices and operations in India, Eastern Africa, Ghana and Nigeria.