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Enhancing cancer care accessibility in Southeast Asia through an integrated care continuum

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The development of technological advancements has made significant contributions to improvements in cancer treatment, diagnosis, and patient management. Specifically, in the field of diagnostics, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning algorithms are revolutionizing cancer detection through high-precision analysis of images and data. Furthermore, digital health platforms and telemedicine are providing remote consultations, monitoring, and support, allowing patients to better manage their treatment and access care. Technological advances are improving cancer care by making it more personalized, more effective, and more accessible.

However, despite major advancements in medical treatment, early detection and prevention remain largely unaddressed, with most patients delaying seeking medical attention until the disease has reached advanced stages. Thus, the medical community is evolving toward decentralized care to overcome these impediments, making cancer treatment more accessible and efficient. The goal of decentralized care is to provide healthcare closer to the patient's location, thereby reducing travel time to centralized hospitals. Through the use of telemedicine and digital health platforms to identify cancer cases earlier and initiate treatment promptly, patients in rural and remote areas where medical facilities are often inadequate can achieve better outcomes. In Southeast Asia, decentralized care enhances cancer treatment by increasing accessibility, reducing delays in diagnosis and treatment, and improving patient outcomes through early intervention and continuous monitoring.

Interestingly, the international healthcare leader, DKSH, is driving the shift toward decentralized care in Southeast Asia. With a strong focus on patient solutions, DKSH is enhancing healthcare accessibility and streamlining cancer treatment. Early intervention and continuous monitoring are key components in preventing diagnostic delays and improving patient outcomes through the integration of telemedicine and digital health platforms. **Ruch De Silva, Head of Patient & Payor Solutions and M&A Lead at DKSH,** discussed cancer-care strategies and initiatives in Southeast Asia and the potential of technology for cancer care and accessibility.

Q1: What are some emerging trends in cancer care? What are the salient features of an impactful one-stop cancer care platform?

Digital health integration and AI-powered diagnostics are leading to a fundamental shift in cancer care. The use of machine learning (ML) and AI algorithms allows for personalized treatment plans, predictive analytics, and early detection, ensuring patients receive more tailored care. These advancements not only improve survival rates but also enhance patients' quality of life.

In addition to AI, we are seeing an increased adoption of value-based care models, where the focus shifts from volume-driven services to quality outcomes. Patients are no longer just treated for cancer; their care is personalized with consideration for their unique genetic profile and other biomarkers, leading to more effective, customized treatments.

Another emerging trend is the expansion of home-based and remote care options, which have become crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic and continues to grow. Telemedicine, mobile health apps, and wearable devices for real-time monitoring provide continuous support for patients, even outside the hospital setting. This shift toward decentralized care makes cancer treatment more accessible, particularly in underserved or rural areas.

Additionally, precision medicine is making remarkable strides, with therapies now being tailored based on an individual's genetic makeup. This method is revolutionizing the treatment landscape by enabling clinicians to predict which treatment will be most effective for each patient. As a result, patients experience fewer side effects and better outcomes.

An impactful one-stop cancer care platform integrates centralized patient data management, ensuring easy access to key information such as medical history, treatment progress, and test results for multidisciplinary care teams. This streamlined approach eliminates redundancies, reduces errors, and accelerates decision-making. Essential features also include real-time coordination among specialists like oncologists, radiologists, and nutritionists, allowing for a unified care approach. Additionally, integrated financial counseling and insurance navigation support patients in managing the financial burden of cancer treatment, especially in regions with high out-of-pocket costs.

Q2: How will integrated cancer care platforms impact healthcare delivery in the future? How can Southeast Asia improve cancer care accessibility by establishing an integrated care continuum?

Integrated cancer care platforms are already improving patient outcomes and healthcare efficiency by reducing delays in care delivery. By centralizing patient data and enabling seamless communication among specialists, these platforms streamline treatment workflows.

Establishing an integrated care continuum in Southeast Asia faces several challenges. A primary issue is the significant infrastructure gap in rural areas, where specialized cancer care is limited. The absence of healthcare facilities and skilled professionals often forces patients to travel long distances for treatment, causing delays in diagnosis and care.

Another major challenge is the shortage of trained healthcare workers, particularly oncologists and radiologists, compounded by financial barriers. Out-of-pocket healthcare spending can reach up to 51% in some countries, limiting access to quality care for many individuals.

Cultural and language barriers also play a role, as regional differences in understanding cancer prevention and treatment can affect care. In some areas, cancer is still stigmatized, which can delay diagnosis and treatment. Furthermore, varying regulatory frameworks across Southeast Asia hinder the implementation of integrated systems, as each country has distinct healthcare standards.

Finally, late-stage diagnoses remain a critical concern, as many patients seek treatment only after cancer has advanced. Early detection programs supported by integrated platforms could help address this issue by enabling timely screenings and follow-up care.

Q3: How does a one-stop platform empower stakeholders to navigate treatment options and manage side effects? How can stakeholders collaborate to improve cancer care and drive innovation?

A well-designed one-stop platform empowers stakeholders—patients, caregivers, healthcare providers, and pharma companies—by offering the tools needed to navigate complex cancer treatments. For patients, the platform provides personalized treatment recommendations based on their genetic data, medical history, and current health condition. Real-time side-effect tracking and symptom management tools enable patients to communicate directly with their healthcare team, ensuring timely interventions.

For healthcare providers, platforms serve as a centralized hub of patient data, facilitating quick decision-making and collaboration across multidisciplinary teams. It also offers a space for sharing knowledge, best practices, and treatment protocols, fostering innovation and enhancing care standards.

For instance, platforms from DKSH Patient Solutions enable patients to access doctors, specialists, and healthcare institutions directly. These efforts have demonstrated the potential for scaling innovative care models and improving patient engagement in Thailand and Taiwan.

Q4: What are DKSH's strategies and initiatives to increase access to cancer care across Southeast Asia?How does DKSH ensure patient burden and costs are reduced in cancer treatment with its integrated system by streamlining treatment regimens and protocols?

In Southeast Asia, where healthcare access varies, DKSH Patient Solutions' platforms can enhance accessibility by connecting remote patients with providers through telehealth. This reduces the need for in-person visits, making oncology services more accessible, especially in rural areas. Ultimately, integrated systems improve coordination, ensuring timely treatments and better survival rates and quality of life.

DKSH patient solutions are designed to provide comprehensive, one-stop solutions for managing patient care across different health conditions. The platforms integrates patient management software with telehealth capabilities to provide continuous access to treatment schedules, side-effect management, and emotional support. Real-time monitoring of patient progress allows healthcare providers to adjust care plans accordingly. Patients and caregivers are able to participate actively in the care process with the assistance of educational resources, financial guidance, and seamless communication between specialists, improving accessibility, coordination, and personalization.

DKSH's integrated system focuses on reducing patient burden and treatment costs through key initiatives that streamline processes and improve efficiency. By optimizing distribution networks, DKSH minimizes logistical inefficiencies, ensuring timely delivery of cancer treatments at a lower cost. This centralized approach to operations enhances supply chain management, reducing treatment delays and financial burdens on patients.

DKSH plays a pivotal role in improving access to cancer care across Southeast Asia through strategic partnerships, tailored market solutions, and efficient distribution networks. With a presence in 36 markets, we are well-positioned to address regional gaps in cancer care access.

A key strategy is to form exclusive partnerships with both local and international pharmaceutical companies to ensure the availability of innovative cancer treatments across the region. DKSH's extensive industry partnerships enable access to oncology treatments in multiple APAC markets, making life-saving therapies more accessible. DKSH operates efficient distribution networks that help reduce treatment costs and ensure timely delivery, even in remote areas. To make cancer treatments more affordable, DKSH works with local governments to develop market-specific pricing strategies.

Additionally, DKSH promotes the use of affordable biosimilars, biologic products that offer similar therapeutic effects at a reduced price compared to branded treatments. This strategy is especially beneficial in regions with high out-of-pocket healthcare expenses, where access to expensive therapies may be limited. DKSH also collaborates with local insurance providers to offer financial support options, reducing patients' out-of-pocket costs for cancer treatments.These efforts collectively help reduce the financial burden on patients while optimizing healthcare resources and improving access to quality cancer care.

Q5: What is your comprehensive outlook regarding technology's potential for cancer care and accessibility? What can be done to amplify cancer prevention and treatment awareness in Asia?

Technology has immense potential to transform cancer care. Cloud-based solutions integrate patient monitoring between providers, improving care coordination and treatment outcomes. The ability for platforms to unify care across various

disciplines ensures that patients receive timely, personalized treatment, enhancing accessibility, particularly in underserved areas.

Emerging technologies such as AI for personalized treatment recommendations, mobile health apps for continuous monitoring, and blockchain for secure patient data management are already reshaping cancer care. These innovations allow healthcare providers to deliver more accurate diagnostics, tailored therapies, and enhance patient engagement, ultimately improving the overall cancer care experience.

To amplify cancer prevention and treatment awareness across Asia, a focus on culturally tailored educational programs, public health campaigns, and early detection initiatives is essential. Collaboration between governments, healthcare providers, and technology companies will be crucial to extend the reach of these efforts. Platforms can play a pivotal role by serving as a hub for education, awareness, and integrated support to drive these initiatives forward.