

DIGITAL HEALTH – A PARADIGM SHIFT FOR HEALTHCARE SYSTEMS

François NICOLAS | Vice-President for Integrated care, Sanofi



Combining medicine, services and technological devices to improve diabetes management

In health care, digital has the potential to significantly improve many processes, especially when it comes to creating new solutions for integrated care to improve patient outcomes. As a pharmaceutical company, Sanofi's traditional role has been to develop medicines for physicians to prescribe, but with diseases like diabetes much more than medicines will be required. People suffering from diabetes need to make considerable changes to their behavior. They have to measure their glucose levels several times each day, carefully take into account what they eat and drink and make sure they get enough physical exercise. Digital technologies could help in the creation of comprehensive solutions related to the behavior and lifestyle changes that people often make after being diagnosed with diseases such as diabetes.

Together, Sanofi and Verily (formerly known as Google Life Sciences) recently announced a joint venture designed to contribute to the advancement of diabetes management. This new company will bring forward solutions that could improve diabetes care by bringing together sensor devices, data, analytics and patient-reported information. It is believed that digital technologies can make diabetes care simpler for patients and healthcare providers. Making care less complex could contribute to a shift from reactive to proactive diabetes management and make living with this disease easier, which could help patients achieve better outcomes.

Challenges to the digital transformation

When it comes to digital transformation within the pharmaceutical industry, there are both internal and external challenges. Internally, the need for a cultural shift could be an initial barrier to digitalization. It is difficult to switch from a business model where the focus has been to develop medicines over long periods of time to a model where companies provide

creative, integrated solutions for shorter periods of time.

Moreover, the pharmaceutical industry will have to acquire the skills required for a digital transformation. Data scientists, people with a broader knowledge of technology and employees who understand consumers will all be needed, working hand in hand with experts in developing medicines. Moreover, digital can provide companies with a direct interface with patients and caregivers. To overcome the challenges associated with digitalization, Sanofi has entered into several partnerships with technology companies.

In terms of external challenges, trust is key. Companies will need to ensure that trust is developed when delivering their new services which is something the industry cannot do by itself. A clear regulatory framework needs to be established, and the larger question of what type of regulatory environment could be most appropriate, including societal concerns, will need to be considered.

Expectations from public authorities

Data. The clearer the framework (i.e., the more harmonized it is within Europe), the better. Health care involves personal data, and more specifically personal health data, which is another category. The main point is to ensure that trust is developed between all the actors.

Change of business model. It is not going to be easy to change the business model in healthcare – whether you are a start-up or an established company. However, business model changes will have major impacts on the different actors, including public and private insurers, and on the way healthcare providers are being paid.

Europe needs to take a leadership role and try to move the agenda forward, for the benefit of all patients and to reduce healthcare costs. Public authorities should work to ensure that this issue is considered at a European level – the only relevant level if the region is to remain competitive vis-à-vis the rest of the world. (July 2016)