Recovery and Resilience in Healthcare.

All industries have been impacted by COVID-19 (CV-19). Amongst the numerous healthcare challenges, the pandemic has highlighted the need for greater resilience in healthcare delivery for patients and communities. From this need, the promise of digital health capabilities is apparent, especially for those operating in medically underserved communities. Clinics and Health Centers should adopt a digital health strategy that expands telehealth to better serve their communities.

The Need for Healthcare Transformation

The US healthcare industry has been ripe for digital transformation for a long time and has lagged behind other industries. Most argue that the US offers the best healthcare in the world and is clearly a leader in innovation. However, per capita US healthcare costs more than every other developed country with very average overall health outcomes, and access to quality healthcare is limited for far too many residents.

The pandemic has exacerbated these conditions and led to greater health disparities in lower income and minority communities. It is forcing healthcare organizations in these communities to adopt a more technology-forward path which will help assure broader access for routine care and access to specialty consults, improve patient experiences at reduced costs – in anticipation of future 'dislocations' like those triggered by CV-19.

The Technology Innovation Wave

While health care workers and organizations are rising to meet challenges brought on by the pandemic, new models of care delivery are evolving and maturing more quickly than before. Most apparent is that tele-visits were ~5% pre-pandemic and rose to more than 30-40% during the pandemic. As we move forward, tele-visits may decline but other digital health capabilities will accelerate and grow.

Private Funding in Healthcare Innovation hit record highs in 2020 as reported by Mercom Capital, CB Insights, Rock Health and others. This is occurring throughout the landscape of healthcare delivery with a proliferation of solutions for Telemedicine, Analytics, Clinical Decision Support, Mobile Health Apps, Healthcare Shopping, Wearable Sensors and more. In fact, many users, patients and providers are not aware of emerging 'digital only' service offerings available today. [This sentence does not make sense to me]

Creating Healthcare Resilience

The American Medical Association recognized three key trends rising to the top of the digital health landscape: (1) Consumerization of health care (2) Access for underserved communities (3)

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Application of Big Data. These trends are accelerating through the pandemic. When viewed through the lens of 'recovery and resilience' it is easy to see why. Smarter use of technology in healthcare has been needed for a long time and the pandemic has exposed the heavy cost and strict limitations of existing healthcare practices. Adopting a locally relevant digital health strategy will promote recovery and build resilient health systems.

Virtual Care Platform. For lesser resourced facilities, this may simply be tele-visit capability with HIPAA-compliant data security and privacy. A more advanced position includes remote diagnostics, remote monitoring, and home health options – a complete virtual care foundation.

Chronic Disease and Wellness. Numerous health apps, wearable sensors, and personalized consults are available for personalized fitness, post-partum or mental health support as well as help to address acute disease conditions such as drug addiction, diabetes, or hypertension. [NOTE: I would argue that diabetes and hypertension and even drug addiction are not "acute"]

Digital Health Framework

I. Design and Implement Virtual Care Approach

II. Establish Solutions for Chronic Disease Conditions

III. Establish Solutions for General Health & Wellness

IV. Incorporate Programs for SDoH

Health Clinics, Federally Qualified Health Centers, and like organizations should adopt a digital health framework in conjunction with their Community Needs Assessment. Existing privacy and security, data management and population health activities will evolve. Greater resilience supporting a strong recovery from CV-19 will result.

Digital health is not a panacea for community health concerns. Addressing disparate health outcomes is a multi-faceted challenge that will not be exclusively solved by technology, but greater digital health literacy - and a defined digital health – is a critical component.