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BLOG POST

I ghostwrote this blog post about the future of the digital health revolution for UTOO Central, a community crowdfunding platform for entrepreneurs.

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What's Next for the Digital Health Revolution?

Over \$4.7 billion of investor capital flowed to digital health companies in 2017. Investors and entrepreneurs pushed the envelope in terms of what digital health could accomplish for both patients and health care providers.

But, what is on the horizon for this sector? While some analysts predict even bigger things from digital health companies in the coming years, others are worried that the sector may be due for a dip because there are too many obstacles for digital health companies to clear.

Defining Digital Health

Digital health is a broad term that describes a technology sector focused primarily on software solutions to problems that patients and health care workers encounter in the healthcare system.

Digital health is not scientific medical research designed to cure and prevent diseases. Neither is it consumer wearable products like smart watches that measure heart rate, activity levels, and distances traveled.

Instead, digital health is more focused on systems and combines different tech disciplines such as big data, AI, and machine learning to create software and digital systems that improve efficiency, reduce mistakes, and make healthcare more accessible to more people.

While digital health is not focused on curing diseases, it is working to save lives by reducing medical mistakes and warning patients and health care providers sooner about important risk factors.



Biggest Obstacles Facing Digital Health Entrepreneurs

Like all revolutionary technologies and movements, digital health is facing many complicated and entrenched obstacles.

Some of the biggest obstacles companies in this sector must overcome include:

- Lack of consistent international standards for health records
- Poor IT infrastructure in the healthcare industry
- Data security
- Privacy issues
- Fast and accurate analysis

Because each region has its own standards and regulatory requirements when it comes to medical records, digital entrepreneurs must either narrowly focus their work on a single market, or come up with a solution that is flexible.

While great strides have been made in healthcare IT infrastructure, many clinics are still lack the computing power and secure networks needed to power the best digital health apps.

The ransomware attacks that crippled many businesses, including health care facilities, in 2017 highlight how important data security is. Government regulators and health care executives want reassurances that digital health technology won't compromise data security.

Privacy concerns are also an obstacle. Most of the concern with privacy comes from the patient side. Patients want to make sure their private medical data will not be used against them in some way.

One of the biggest obstacles digital health entrepreneurs face is how to deliver useful, fast analysis of all of the data digital health technologies collect. Medical personnel need help sorting through all of the data. Data is only useful when it is properly synthesized.



Digital health must rely on AI and machine learning to select meaningful data for health care providers.

Getting People to Share Their Health Data

One of the bottlenecks in the digital health space is getting people to share their health data. What can entrepreneurs do to convince more people to share their data using new products and services?

There are three reasons people are reluctant to share their data:

1. Fear of loss of privacy and ownership of their health data
2. Fear of lack of security or their data being used against them
3. Lack of understanding of the benefits of sharing their health data

Entrepreneurs must establish trust with consumers by developing strong privacy policies. They must make it clear that they are not selling their data to advertisers. Security is closely related to privacy, but comes with its own issues. Entrepreneurs should provide a security guarantee. If consumers see that a company is willing to put their money where their mouth is, they are more likely to trust the company with their data.

It is easy for digital health entrepreneurs to take for granted all the great things sharing personal health data can accomplish. But, to most consumers these advantages are not obvious. Companies must use their marketing efforts to show consumers how sharing their data makes them healthier and happier. Without consistent education, consumers will be reluctant to hand over the data digital health companies need.

The Role of Southeast Asian Tech Startups

While there are many obstacles facing digital health, they are not insurmountable. Digital health startups in Southeast Asia are poised to help lead the way through many of these obstacles.



Southeast Asian tech companies continue to command increasingly large amounts of venture capital. Singapore already has the broadband infrastructure and reliable health care IT infrastructure to implement the latest digital health technologies.

Singapore is acting as a gateway to other large Southeast Asian cities looking to take the leap with digital health.

In the coming years facilities in places as diverse as Jakarta and Manila will be ready to take advantage of digital health advances. Startups from all over the region will be competing to service these vanguard medical facilities.

The lessons learned in these Southeast Asian markets will be applied to markets all over the world.

Digital health may have a lot of problems to solve, but there is enough investor interest and ingenuity throughout Southeast Asia to keep pushing this sector forward for many years to come.

