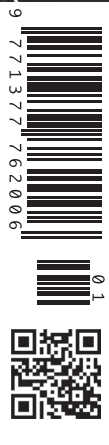




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Reimagined Hospitals



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The Empowered Patient: Capitalising on Information and Technology

Summary: We might be ready for the new hospital and the new healthcare system, but are we ready for the empowered patient?

When we talk about the future of healthcare or the future of healthcare systems and hospitals, we tend to overlook one very important aspect: the patient. Yes, advanced technology, artificial intelligence, big data, machine learning, deep learning, etc are expected to change the way we practice healthcare, but at the same time, we also need to consider the fact that in this day and age of advanced technology and information access, our patient has also become empowered.

Today, patients know that they are responsible for their health. They understand that they have the right to make their own health decisions. And that is why, we see that today, more and more patients have become assertive in their demand for quality care. As we move into a new business model for healthcare, and as we reimagine new hospitals and new tools for diagnosis and treatment, we must also understand that the empowered patient has to be a partner in this transition. Empowered patients know the role they can play in the modern age of healthcare. They know

perspective is important. The patient perspective must not be ignored.

It is time to accept that patients have the power to change how we deliver care. The healthcare system, as it stands today, is suffering from a disconnect between patients and healthcare delivery. We tend to forget that all this technological advancement and all this innovation that we see today is primarily driven by patients. Healthcare systems have to adopt these advancements in order to provide the best possible treatment for patients. Why? Because that is what patients demand. Because that is what patients want. Because that is what patients deserve. After all, our job is to provide care to these patients, isn't it?

Gone are the days when the doctor-patient interaction was a one-way street. There are two major contributors to this reality. First, patients have access to a tremendous amount of health information from the internet. All of it may not be accurate, but they have access to both the good and the bad. Second, clinicians have access to

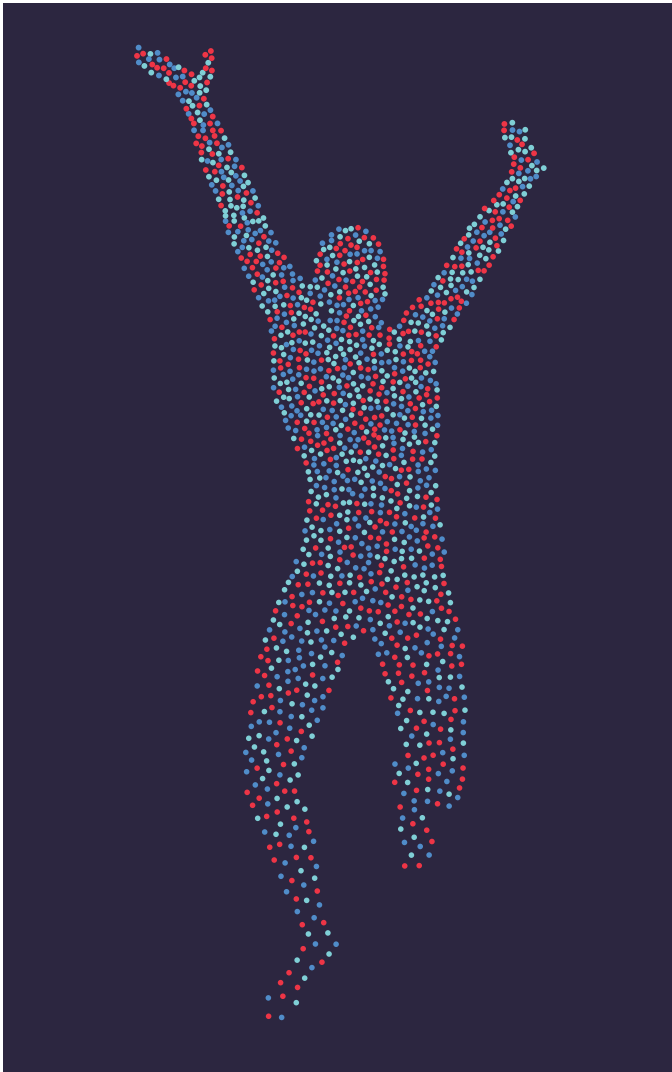
The empowered patient has the power to generate an “e-revolution” where traditional methods of communication will no longer apply

that by using preventive measures, they can prevent many diseases. They also know they need to adhere to prescriptions, that they need to get the required tests done, that they need to follow-up after these tests, and that they need to follow what healthcare providers advise.

Nobody is saying that the empowered patient should replace the clinician. No. Everybody has their role in this healthcare system, and on the patient's part, they need to take an active role in their health. If they feel that their cholesterol may have gone up, but their family physician has not advised any tests, they can speak up and ask for it. Many times, it is only the patient who can understand what's happening inside their body. Many times, test results don't reveal what may actually be going on. The patient

advanced science and new ways to treat diseases, manage illness, and improve patient outcomes. What is the result of all this? More informed and more assertive patients, who have something to bring to the table, and who want to have a two-way conversation with their healthcare provider. We all talk about personalised medicine, but this is really what we mean by this term. Customising healthcare care decisions and practices and tailoring them for each individual patient's needs (Williams 2014).

We must also address the important role information and communication technology (ICT) has played in creating the empowered patient. ICT has now inserted itself into the patient-doctor relationship, and it has resulted in a significant change in healthcare. Patients and doctors can now



communicate via computers. This e-mediated communication has changed the way doctors and patients interact. (Andreassen et al. 2006). Face-to-face patient/doctor interaction is now becoming less and exchanges through electronic devices are becoming more common. We have already seen that many aspects of the healthcare system have changed with technology such as electronic health records (EHR), biometric and telemedicine devices, smart-phone applications and the Internet (Weiner 2012).

When we talk about patient-doctor communication in the context of e-health, and in the presence of health information technology (HIT) tools, we need to keep one thing in mind. Modern healthcare systems have now transitioned

from a single-physician model to a multidisciplinary team of doctors, who interact either physically or virtually. Similarly, a patient is no longer just a patient. A patient is now part of a family or a social network (Weiner 2012). That is another aspect of the empowered patient that we must consider - the presence of their families and the need to improve healthcare's response to this fact and the need to improve how we, as clinicians, engage with patient families.

The empowered patient has the power to capitalise on information and technology. The empowered patient, thus, has the power to generate an "e-evolution" where traditional methods of communication will no longer apply and where interactions between clinicians, healthcare systems, patients, caregivers, and the overall community will change significantly. The components of this e-evolution, be it EHRs, ICT, HIT, mHealth, or eHealth, will change healthcare as we know it. As hospitals adopt technology and implement new systems to improve their operations and their efficiency, patients, with the power of information and technology, will also play their part in changing the dynamics of the patient-doctor relationship and forcing healthcare providers to take them seriously and to understand that they don't intend to remain silent partners anymore. ■

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Key Points

- Patients have the power to change how we deliver care.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) has now inserted itself into the patient-doctor relationship.
- Modern healthcare systems have now transitioned from a single-physician model to a multidisciplinary team of doctors.
- A patient is no longer just a patient, but a part of a family or a social network.

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