

HEALTHCARE

The Changing Face of Healthcare

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The world of healthcare is in a state of change. We are very close to a perfect storm with an aging population, skyrocketing healthcare delivery costs, a rising number of uninsured people and a lack of skilled professionals. In order to gain the efficiencies required to avoid this storm, the government is pumping a massive amount of funding into the healthcare arena in support of the computerization and integration of healthcare services. The systems and technologies in place today are ripe for change. As we have seen, entry level healthcare providers expect tools, automation, and technology comparable to those they leveraged during their education and training. Tools such as laptops, instant messaging, mobility, telemedicine, and electronic medical systems are required to attract talent to prospective employers.

Many hospitals and clinics pride themselves on having the latest healthcare equipment, processes and methods, but few have updated the way that they communicate with their clients. Most of us communicate with each other via cell phone, e-mail, instant messaging, social networks, and through picture messages. So why doesn't the healthcare industry? When was the last time you sent a text message to set up a medical appointment? Healthcare is finally catching up to communications technology

As we look at today's infrastructure, the need to enhance and provide solutions that integrate and deliver business requirements, adapt to needs without replacement, and can be combined or extended are expected by the clinical business partners. The adaptability of an infrastructure is paramount to satisfy today's business demands.

Some HMO providers, such as Kaiser Permanente, provide patients with the capability to log on to their healthcare website (<https://www.kaiserpermanente.org>). Patients can set appointments, review lab results, research health information, send e-mail to their doctors, and review their personal medical records. HMOs hope to reduce support costs while improving continuity of care and patient response. These technologies let the would-be caller bypass the expensive resources and satisfy their needs with self-service.

Companies like iMedix (<http://www.imedix.com>) want to put a new face on healthcare communications – they have created a "Facebook" for physicians. Doctors using high-tech communications to collaborate with each other, providers, pharmaceutical companies, specialists, and hospitals can now streamline the collaboration process. This blend of social networking, search, and healthcare is a growing trend. They follow the Platinum Rule (<http://www.platinumrule.com/index.html>) and communicate with you the way that you prefer to receive information.

Communications technologies may be a way to lower healthcare costs. Access to information, people, and services is critical when dealing with one's health issues. Low-cost access to high-cost resources is what consumers are looking for today. In a national poll (<http://www.rd.com/living-healthy/readers-digest-health-care-poll/article26383.html>), "two-thirds of adults 21 and older said they feel they 'can't afford to get sick?'. Among those identified as middle class and "underinsured," one in three said that healthcare is "completely" or "mostly" unaffordable. About half say they've put off or refused medical treatment for a serious condition, or delayed taking or renewing prescription drugs; 46% have postponed routine annual physicals; and 27% have avoided surgery of some sort.

Many healthcare plans cover phone consultations with physicians as part of their standard benefits package. As these communications and collaborative technologies are embraced by the healthcare industry, healthcare providers will surely begin to redefine coverage terms and conditions.

Collaboration bridges the gap between technology, people, and systems

As trusted business partners, the Healthcare Information Technology team understands the vision and is providing adaptable systems that enable these strategies. For example, in years past, independent networks were built and dedicated to phones, computers, and Bio-Medical systems.

These independent systems were rarely tied together. They were managed, monitored, staffed and funded separately with different service and response models. This provided very little adaptability, cost savings and responsiveness. With the advance of new technologies in networking, these independent barriers can be broken down to leverage a

single healthcare network.

The promise for medical networking companies is the ability to have a network of physicians and medical care experts not only tied to each other but also tied to patients who want and need access to that knowledge base. These companies look to combine the benefits of both health search engines like Healthline (<http://www.healthline.com/>), Organized Wisdom (<http://organizedwisdom.com/Home>), and health communities like Daily Strength (<http://www.dailystrength.org/>) into a comprehensive offering for the online health consumer.

New communications technology brings medicine home for those who do not live near to medical facilities. Companies such as Cisco Systems (<http://www.cisco.com/>) sell technologies that make Telemedicine a reality for people who do not live close to medical and healthcare services. Patients using these telemedicine facilities can have doctors examine them remotely by taking their blood pressure, weight, temperature, etc. through devices attached to a high definition video screen. Doctor and patient see each other face-to-face in real-time.

These technologies rely upon, secure, reliable, and pervasive communications platforms. Companies such as Nexus IS (<http://www.nexusis.com>) have configured self-sensing network capabilities (BIO-NAC) that allow for hospitals and clinics to reduce the costs of infrastructure support. Such companies also bridge the gaps between technologies as many of them now show common elements that rely upon the network infrastructure. These include patient interaction systems and methods to interoperate hardware and software applications for voice, video, and data across the network. These companies are critical because they know how to make the technologies deliver the business and human needs for which they were developed.

Communication technologies will continue to change the face of healthcare. Look for companies who plan to combine the benefits of Telemedicine with other telecommunication systems and methods as you plan your financial portfolio. New stimulus monies targeted at the healthcare industry could produce some great investment opportunities for those who want to capitalize on the changing face of healthcare.

For more information, please visit www.nexusis.com



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