

Interview with Sreeji Gopinathan, Chief Information Officer, Lupin Limited

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There has been an increasing uptake of digital technologies across the healthcare sector of late. The healthcare industry is deploying a mix of traditional and disruptive technologies such as mobility, big data analytics, cloud, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) to ensure that the overall care process is effective and cost-efficient. In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, mobile health, telemedicine and cloud consulting have also gained significant traction. Sreeji Gopinathan, Chief Information Officer, Lupin Limited talks about the emerging information and communication technology trends in the healthcare space, the status of technology adoption and the future outlook...

How has technology transformed the Indian healthcare sector? What are some of the key digital trends?

Healthcare delivery, patient care and healthcare management have evolved significantly in the last few years due to the onset of the pandemic. Technologies such as AI, IoT, Blockchain and Edge Computing are also helping improve the quality of patient engagement, enabling a reduction in costs and bringing better control over how the healthcare delivery takes place. Pharma companies are looking at combining IoT devices with data analytics using AI. Today, many companies have also automated contact tracing mechanisms to ensure safety of employees.

Businesses from different industries and geographical locations, today, are turning to cloud services to store, manage and process data. Most of the large-scale organizations have already tasted the benefits of cloud computing and IT teams are working with providers to add further value to these services.

Depending on the scenarios, choice is made on cloud vs on-prem or hybrid models.

Digital interaction between doctors, marketing reps and patients has also significantly increased during the pandemic.

What are your views on e-healthcare trend which has emerged amidst the pandemic? Can you give some market projections for e-Health market?

COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the way organisations interact with their customers. It has now become imperative to adopt a digital first customer engagement model and place digital transformation at the heart of organisational strategy, to ensure alignment with the future of customer & employee engagement and experience.

Organisations are now focusing on the ways to:

- Create secure and simplified experiences for customers
- Have a simplified customer engagement mechanism
- Ensure employee productivity is managed

The pandemic has underlined the need for shifting towards a comprehensive patient-centric approach for the healthcare and the pharmaceutical industry.

Digital Health market is going through unprecedented growth and is expected to be 5x in a decade. Appropriate opportunities to deliver business and customer value would be leveraged which would also present lot of challenges that needs to be dealt with.

What are the key use cases of new age technologies such as AI, IoT, cloud, big data, AR/VR in the healthcare sector? How are you leveraging these solutions?

The Internet of Medical Things (IoMT) has the power to create insights about the patient's health and treatment protocols in real time. It can also provide rich insights to healthcare providers and pharma organisations on opportunities to improve healthcare service.

The healthcare delivery ecosystem encompassing the medical expertise, data gathering using sensors / IoT devices, control using blockchain and data analytics using AI /ML has the potential to transform the way healthcare is provided.

Lupin's Anya chatbot uses conversational AI to provide verified information about different respiratory conditions like COPD, asthma etc. The Respira device is also going through a journey of IoT enablement for effective care delivery. There are many other use cases of leveraging data analytics and digital technologies to improve tangible outcomes and efficiencies. These range from processes across the value chain – manufacturing processes to quality control, supply chain etc. Typically these are for initiatives like improving yield, preventive maintenance, utility cost reduction, supplier collaboration etc

What are some of the challenges encountered while deploying the new age solutions?

With many employees still working remotely, it is important to make sure that their electronic records are reliable and secure across their entire data lifecycle, from initial data creation all the way through long-term archival. Cybercrime has become one of the fastest growing areas of concern for the sector.

Strategies for cybersecurity in the pharma industry were previously driven by compliance requirements. Firms handling huge amounts of patient and healthcare data tend to become a target for cyber criminals who are on the lookout to exploit information for personal or financial gains. Cyber-attacks have also become more sophisticated and devastating for the industry.

Some of the biggest challenges and areas of concern here include integrated networks leading to complexity, an outdated infrastructure, insider threats, expanding digital attack surface- cloud, IoT, remote working and compliance obligations.

There is a need for an integrated security operations where data is classified with controlled access mechanisms and the firm is immediately alerted in case of aberrant acts. Organisations must adopt a 'security-first' approach which involves continuous monitoring and management of cloud security risks and threats, leveraging modern tools and automation.

What do you think is the future of telemedicine in India? How is it expected to transform the sector?

With digitization and technology pervading the industry much faster than previously anticipated, this shift from Healthcare practitioners (HCP) or medicine focus to a patient-centred approach will be much quicker. HCPs need better training and telemedicine standards to ensure that a virtual consultation translates to healing. Similarly, pharma players have to look beyond drug innovation towards a digital revolution in how they research, manufacture and test their products.

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