



# QUALITY CONNECT

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**"Medication without Harm"**  
World Patient safety Day 2022

**MEDICATION SAFETY**  
*Working together to make  
healthcare safer*



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# FUTURE OF HEALTHCARE



**HEALTHCARE IS GOING DIGITAL!**  
ARE WE GOING TOO?

**MR. RIZWAN KOITA**

Co-founder CitiusTech

Co-founder Koita Foundation

**Digital health and global impact**

Industries across the world are going through a metamorphosis and technology is playing an increasingly important role. For example, online banking and peer-to-peer mobile transactions have completely changed the profile of the financial services market. Similarly, travel, entertainment, retail and e-commerce industries have completely transformed in the past 10-15 years.

While the healthcare industry worldwide has been a little behind in the adoption of technology, it has clearly changed in the past 5 years, and at a faster pace in the last 2 years driven by the Covid pandemic. The more visible consumer and patient facing examples include the use of telemedicine, which has increased by over 30 times in the past two years. Similarly, the consumer health device market has increased significantly over the years – an estimated 320 million consumer health and wearable wellness devices will be sold in 2022. The digital health revolution is being fueled by technology innovation (cloud, AI/ML), strong investment in digital health innovation, increase in high-speed internet and mobile penetration, changes in government regulations and last but not the least, changes in consumer preferences.

The use of digital tools is having a meaningful positive impact on healthcare and all its key stakeholders. Hospitals using electronics medical records can better organize patient information, support evidence-based care, track clinical quality

and performance metrics. Digital tools also help in analysing patient and administrative information to track efficiency and improve clinical and financial performance. Similarly, use of mobile and digital tools are enabling doctors and physicians to better track their patients, support patients across different care settings (including telemedicine) and take advantage of clinical decision support tools. On the other hand, patients can use digital technologies to better manage their health, organize their health information (e.g., PHRs) and share this information across care providers. Patients can also take advantage of mobile health applications for chronic care management (e.g., medication adherence, vital tracking) and wellness management (e.g., fitness).

**Digital health and India Opportunity**

India is a large developing country with significant opportunities to improve healthcare delivery and access. Healthcare capacity is a big issue and there is significant disparity between rural and urban areas. India today has 0.3 beds per thousand and 1.1 per thousand in rural and urban areas respectively, vis-à-vis the global benchmark of 3.5 beds per thousand. Similarly, quality of healthcare delivery needs to be enhanced - India ranks 145th in the WHO's Healthcare Access and Quality Index. Healthcare costs and lack of health insurance is also a big issue - it is estimated that unplanned healthcare costs push over 60 million Indians into poverty each year.



Digital health can play a key role in improving accessibility, quality and affordability of healthcare in India, as is seen across the world. Fortunately, India has made good progress on multiple fronts, which will enable us to accelerate the adoption of Digital Health over the next few years:

- **Digital Infrastructure:** India has seen a rapid growth in use of internet and smartphones. The wireless data usage increased by more than 7 folds between 2017 and 2021 according to the Economic Survey of India. Similarly, the number of smartphone users in India increase from less than 400 Mn in 2017, to over 850 Mn in 2021.
- **Consumer Preferences:** As consumers are becoming more comfortable with use of smartphones and mobile applications, they are increasing using mobile devices for financial transactions, news, social media and entertainment. Consequently, per capita wireless data usage increased from just 1.24 GB per month to a whopping 14.1 GB between 2017 and 2021.
- **Digital Innovation:** The growth of mobile devices, availability of high-speed internet and changing consumer preferences for online transactions is creating new companies across all sectors of our economy, which are disrupting their markets. Companies like MakeMyTrip and Yatra for travel, Zerodha and Upstox for stock broking, and Zomato and Swiggy for food delivery have had huge impact on their respective industries. In healthcare too, companies like PharmEasy, Tata 1Mg, and NetMeds are changing the pharmacy business. Many existing healthcare organizations are also adopting their business models and making them more digital e.g., leading labs and diagnostics companies.
- **Government focus:** There is significant government focus on creating and scaling public digital platforms – Aadhar, UPI and COWIN. The COWIN platform is being used to track close to one billion vaccinations and is recognized as a leading platform worldwide. India is now supporting several dozen countries in their vaccination efforts. Interestingly, in a developed

country like US, citizens are still using physical cards for tracking vaccinations.

- **ABDM / Digital Health ID initiative:** The National Health Authority (NHA) is rolling out the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM) technology platform across the country. ABDM requires citizens to create unique health accounts – ASHA (Ayushman Bharat Health Account), and hospitals and doctors to create their unique ABDM IDs. The creation of these IDs, coupled with consent management tools for data sharing has the potential to significantly increase collaboration between all stakeholders (including labs, pharmacies and health insurance), and transform healthcare across the country.

India is at a cusp of a major Digital Health transformation (including ABDM) over the next 5-10 years. If Digital Health is rolled-out in a structured manner and adopted correctly by all the stakeholders in the healthcare ecosystem, its impact on healthcare can be very significant – like the impact of Aadhar and UPI on India!

The adoption of Digital Health in India and the adoption of ABDM platform will require an integrated approach across various stakeholders – doctors, hospitals, labs, pharmacies, ancillary care providers and patients. We will need to define simple and clear digital health focus areas based on healthcare delivery needs, current and desired skills of professionals and staff in different healthcare settings and financial constraints on technology investments. Furthermore, to improve return on investments in Digital Health, we can prioritise initiatives which improve productivity, efficiency and reduce operating costs for hospitals and healthcare providers.

### NABH and Digital Health Opportunity

As India's leading accreditation and certification organization for hospitals and healthcare providers, NABH has a unique opportunity to play a pivotal role in driving digital health in India. NABH has the expertise, resources and credibility to work with various stakeholders to build a clear vision of how digital health can be used to improve quality, access and cost of healthcare across the country. By

supporting digital transformation of healthcare in India, NABH will have a lasting positive impact on all stakeholders - doctors, hospitals, healthcare providers and patients.

For NABH to play this pivotal role, NABH will need to develop a strong digital health vision, which is aligned with the ABDM roadmap. Key elements of the vision could include:

- Focusing on digital health tools which make healthcare delivery more efficient, accessible, affordable, and safe
- Ensuring digital tools are robust, easy to maintain and commercially viable for hospitals and healthcare organizations
- Supporting healthcare information interoperability/sharing health records
- Tracking and benchmarking key clinical and financial performance indicators
- Ensuring high security and privacy of patient information
- Providing training, capacity building and other support to all stakeholders

To achieve its vision, NABH will need to formulate a comprehensive Digital Health strategy. The Strategy could include:

- Define NABH Digital Health certification standards. These certifications could be independent or augment existing NABH certifications. Similarly, the certifications could be at one level or be tiered based on scale and digital maturity of an organization
- Provide digital health requirements and certify healthcare technology products used by hospitals and healthcare providers
- Augment current NABH training and technical capabilities to support digital transformation (e.g., Digital Health training, technical support, testing sandbox)

In summary, India is at a cusp of a digital health revolution, which can significantly enhance healthcare delivery and patient engagement. NABH has an exciting opportunity to be a leader in this transformation. It will need to develop a robust

long-term vision and strategy to do this, working closely with hospitals and healthcare providers. Let all of us working in healthcare embrace this upcoming change and make India a leading example for digital health and affordable healthcare for the world!

