



Innovations in the modern world, creating opportunities for pharmacy

Innovations propel the modern world, just as industrialisation did in the 20th century. A new tsunami - technology and artificial intelligence - is providing pharmacy with the opportunity to be more integrated in healthcare systems, provide more convenient and new personalised, efficient, shared decision process services, that are more people centred, with a continuous, better quality, inclusive and equitable approach. Technology can support pharmacists to improve health, humanistic, and economic outcomes.

The explosion of technological advances is reshaping the future of health care. It is changing the way we work, our roles and our environment. In this shifting landscape, we must be able to ensure these advances fully contribute to tackling our health challenges, especially those we are facing in pharmacy.

We must quickly consolidate our role and, just as the profession integrated industries into its environment, it will be necessary to take ownership of new trends, new technologies, new logistic models and integrate them into our everyday work in the service of our communities. Pharmacy must lead change and tame the new features rather than just adapting to them.

Digitalisation

Digitisation brings unprecedented transformation to the healthcare landscape and compels us to fully rethink healthcare for the digital age. This is a challenging exercise.

The COVID-19 crisis has provided circumstantial evidence on how IT developments in interoperability and the use of e-Health and m-Health, automatization and artificial intelligence technologies allow systems and processes to be more fluid, more convenient, more transparent, more accessible and closer to patients' and health professionals' expectations, with the chance of offering new complex fully digital services, apart from the digitalisation and improvement of current analogic ones.

The use of such technologies as e-prescribing, electronic health records, telehealth, telepharmacy, telecare and telemedicine, as well as the use of mobile health, wearables, remote monitoring sensors or artificial intelligence (enabled medical devices) has demonstrated having a better continuity of healthcare for patients which would not have been possible otherwise due to lockdown travel restrictions. This finally resulted in more patients under care.

Technological advances and innovations are expanding applications of digital technologies in healthcare and pharmacy - a trend which is not going to stop or slow down. An important aspect is that these new technologies are becoming more and more complex and difficult for health professionals to embrace, particularly in case of convergence of digital technologies with other technologies - the future 3D printing combined with genomic technology being one example. Moreover, digital solutions continuously need to be updated regularly, sometimes requiring alignment of their potential impact on the digital environment and being sure that the right ethical approach, data privacy, evidence based approach and equity should be ensured by design.

As such, the digital era is rapidly evolving, providing pharmacists and pharmaceutical sciences across the world with new opportunities to provide and improve pharmaceutical care. Implementation of new technologies in daily pharmaceutical practice, however, is still relatively limited even though current times require pharmacists to find alternative ways of providing pharmaceutical care. Implementation largely depends on having the right mid- and long term vision for the profession, and the willingness and ability to use these tools by pharmacists. It involves costs around acquisition, maintenance and new developments. Digital provision of services also depends on policy development.

Digital is disrupting the pharmacy

Digital is here to help. Today, digitalisation is already driving healthcare differentiation offering patients new pathways for care. Innovative start-ups across the care value chain are driving greater data interoperability, increasing the volume of alternative health data, and unbundling traditionally centralized health services, with consumerisation of healthcare being an important driver for change.

Advancements in digital health have also led to greater consumer choice when it comes to healthcare, including pharmacy services. At-home remote health monitoring devices like electrocardiograms, adherence services, wearables with biometrics, home IoT and voice technologies are extending the patient touch point.

Additionally, there are digital services from online diagnosis to prescription management and delivery, as well as discounts on medicines - saving care providers time and simplifying and improving the patient experience. These actors across value chain are not only challenging the status quo of the industry but are also more effective at gaining patient trust, while improving access to medicines.

It is evident that the future of pharmacy will be more about patient experience, but the key focus remain – to optimize treatment, innovating new patient-centric services that prioritize patient trust with better outcomes.

Healthcare providers as well as pharmacy can build and prioritize patient trust by providing consistent care communication, frictionless care coordination, and greater accuracy and transparency. This is what today's customers expect, and it is a key driver of business success.

A pharmacy is the closest and most accessible patient touch point in the care value chain and is therefore strategically positioned to respond to this trust gap.

The Tech enabled pharmacy

Embedding technology in the pharmacy can unlock the value of the pharmacist and the pharmacy, to help care for patients, improving health outcomes for the patient. By using technology, pharmacists can maintain a critical and neutral position as full members of the patient's care team.

A tech-enabled pharmacy and a pharmaceutical workforce can help them provide more value for patients and for the healthcare system. When the technology is appropriately leveraged, this brings the pharmacist-patient interaction to the forefront.

The real value of the pharmacy is the added value pharmacists provide to their patients, as they by the use of technology can significantly improve patient care, and allow pharmacists to provide more value to them, healthcare systems and other healthcare professionals. While more value activities can be automatized, human pharmacy teams can invest their valuable time and resources to more complex and even new activities, that take more advantage of the unique skills and values of pharmacists and their teams. In a time of automation, pharmacists should keep showing their empathy and compassion, as facilitators of better outcomes.

A tech-enabled pharmacy also allows the pharmacist to act as full members of the patient's care team. Patients are the winners when pharmacists can bring their pharmacological expertise together with the medical expertise of physicians and nurses. Furthermore, the pharmacy and the pharmacist are the most accessible healthcare provider.

Now, as pharmacy enters a new technological era, pharmacies have the chance to promote pharmacists once again, empowering them to act as providers integral to a patient's care team.

The FIP Development Goals, launched by the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) in September 2020, are a key resource for transforming the pharmacy profession over the next decade globally, regionally and nationally. They align with FIP's mission to support global health by enabling the advancement of pharmaceutical practice, sciences and education and are set to transform pharmacy in alignment with wider global imperatives underpinning the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Having a set of "One FIP" Development Goals enables us to identify commonalities across all areas of FIP, as well as some unique attributes in each area. It is imperative to bring science, practice and workforce & education together into one transformative framework for our members and the wider profession to clearly set out the goals for development for the next decade. This is also outlined in the FIP Development Goal number 20 – Digital Health, outlining how pharmaceutical science, education and pharmacy practice brings value to patients.

Strategies for the future

The FIP strategies such as the Community Pharmacy Vision 2020-2025, the FIP Development Goals, the vaccination agenda, the primary healthcare strategy, the Global Pharmacy Observatory (GPO) and the FIP Technology Advisory Group are important tools for our pharmacy community.

Community pharmacists are always ready to provide more value, implement collaborative services, harness new technology through access to the four cornerstones of the expert and unique care of community pharmacists: review, prescribe, dispense and administer.

By being part of the technological advances, pharmacy can deliver universal, safer, more accessible, timely and better value healthcare through a more compassionate, personalised and rewarding model of care for the communities we serve, now and into the future. But to assure the sustainability of the new technologies, it is important that pharmacists get the right remuneration for implementing, using and evolving them for the benefit of their population and health systems.

As new technologies are implemented in healthcare and life sciences at an exponential rate, the value chain within healthcare is also getting disrupted.

Patients are now, and especially post-Covid 19, becoming more focused in improving their overall health. In this new environment – with increased patient/consumer expectations and the development of technology opportunities are persistently emerging for pharmacists and pharmacies to evolve, expand and improve accordingly, providing more value for patients and healthcare systems.

Given these opportunities, the role of pharmacists and pharmacies in the healthcare ecosystem is also evolving, wherein telehealth, artificial learning and machine learning is driving the maximum change and improved outcomes – with pharmacy as an integrated actor in primary healthcare. While regulators need to address the use of discounts and the use of marketing tools to not promote the purchase of unnecessary and detrimental medical products, it is important thereby, not only to focus on ‘fast, cheap and convenient’ delivery of medicines, which can improve the access to needed products, but to understand and acknowledge the capabilities of pharmacies in the digital era, and the way in which its role will evolve as part of an integrated team. Technology brings new opportunities through combining care with supply, opportunities that can’t be ignored by the profession, if pharmacists want to remain being critical actors in the healthcare ecosystem, and leading to better health outcomes.

Pharmacies will continue to have a unique value proposition in the market, but the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the trend of meeting consumers and patients where they are, and that is driving growth for online pharmacies and medication delivery as well.

FIP supports its member organisations to challenge our own profession, and policy-makers and regulators to resource and unleash the untapped potential of pharmacy through full scope universal pharmacy care. While welcoming and embracing new technologies, FIP remains a strong advocate and supporter for patient safety, patient data privacy and personalised care. With the FIP resources, and the FIP Development Goals, including the goal on Digital health, we can transform “the Pharmacy of the Future”.

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Mr Lars-Åke Söderlund
Co-Chair FIP Technology Advisory Group



Mr Jaime Acosta Gomez
Co-Chair FIP Technology Advisory Group

International Pharmaceutical Federation www.fip.org