



Centre for Digital Transformation at IIM Ahmedabad

Policy Briefing:

Patient-Engaging Digital Services for Healthcare

● Introduction

Patients are increasingly taking responsibility for their own healthcare. Digital technologies are revolutionizing access to care practices and health information. While involvement in clinical processes requires medical expertise, engagement with administrative processes—such as scheduling appointments or sharing information—is easily feasible because of the access to mobile phones and other technologies by patients. However, to harness the potential of patient engagement, hospitals need to create digital services that engage patients in the process of care creation—administrative, clinical, or both. Do these digital services enhance the hospital's care quality and patient satisfaction when they are admitted? This question was answered by the research study by Aljafari, Soh, Setia, and Agarwal (2023) that explores the role of environmental factors, specifically population access to computing resources and health insurance coverage, in influencing the effects of patient-engaging digital services on patient satisfaction and readmission rates in hospitals.

● Research Findings

The study builds upon the theoretical frameworks of resource dependency and environmental munificence, to unravel the role of environmental contingencies. These contingencies explain the differences in the impact of digital services in healthcare. Key findings from this research include:

Greater computing amongst the population in a region strengthens the impacts of digital services on readmissions and patient satisfaction: The research demonstrates that hospitals located in regions with greater computing access experience a stronger positive effect of patient-engaging digital services on both patient satisfaction and reducing readmissions.

In high-computing regions, greater service access dampens the effect of patient-engaging digital services on readmissions but not patient satisfaction: The findings reveal that access to health insurance in a region influences the impact of digital services differently. While greater access has a dampening effect on the moderated effect of digital services and computing access concerning readmission rates, this effect does not manifest in patient satisfaction. This suggests that digital services are even more effective in reducing readmissions for hospital operations in high-computing regions with lesser health insurance coverage. However, the same hospitals may see lower impacts on patient satisfaction.

● Policy Implications

Based on these research findings, policymakers, healthcare administrators, and stakeholders should consider the following implications:

Regional Variation Matters: Hospitals do not operate in a vacuum. The regional environment influences the abilities of hospitals to leverage their digital services. Policymakers and healthcare organizations should recognize and account for regional demographic variations as they create plans for implementing patient-engaging digital services.

Targeted Interventions: In regions with limited computing access, hospitals may need targeted interventions to bridge the digital divide among the population, such as improving access to digital resources. This can enhance the impact of digital services at hospitals in these areas.

Role of Health Insurance: When assessing the impact of digital services on healthcare performance, it is essential to consider the presence of health insurance coverage in a region. This may influence the strategy and objectives of digital service implementation, particularly regarding readmission reduction.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Regular monitoring and evaluation of the impact of patient-engaging digital services in specific hospital regions are crucial. This should be an ongoing process to recalibrate strategies for digital transformation.

Collaboration: Hospitals, healthcare organizations, and policymakers should collaborate to better understand and address the unique challenges and opportunities presented by their regional environments. Sharing best practices and knowledge can help optimize the benefits of digital services.

● For More Information

Please contact Prof. Pankaj Setia, chr-cdt@iima.ac.in for more information.

Reference:

Aljafari, Ruba, Franck Soh, Pankaj Setia, and Ritu Agarwal. "The local environment matters: Evidence from digital healthcare services for patient engagement." Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science (2023): 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-023-00972-0>

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