

A Lens Into the Future of Healthcare With Technology-based Solutions

In 2015, it became apparent that investors were rapidly pouring money into digital health start-up companies and backing innovators who were eager to stake their claim within the trillion-dollar healthcare industry.

In 2019, hardly a day goes by without us hearing about yet another company acquiring funding to “get into healthcare.” The deals are getting larger and larger, and more investors than ever before seem to be taking the plunge into digital health.

Rock Health has been tracking investments within the digital health ecosphere since 2011, and according to their recent data, funding in 2019 will reach \$10 to \$12 billion.¹

Whereas investments in past years focused more on consumer-based products, the recent shift into the pharmaceutical arena has been rapid and noteworthy.

The spike in investment activity seems to fall within the categories of R&D, clinical trials, and digital therapeutics. Although consumer health is still a vital sector, more money is being invested in these areas that traditionally fell solely under pharma’s domain. Digital therapeutics is no longer seen simply as a “beyond the pill” service. Instead, it is gaining strength as a standalone product, as are partnerships or outright acquisitions of consumer-oriented technologies now bolstering a nascent area for the pharma industry.

AI seems to be everywhere. Atomwise, Owkin, and Insilico are changing the R&D process by applying the power of machines, at scale, globally. Merck recently partnered with Atomwise, and GlaxoSmithKline is partnering with Insilico Medicine. TrinetX is connecting systems to speed up research by combining longitudinal data with analytics to answer complex research questions in almost real time.

The Race to the Top

The race to be the first to connect patients, create seamless experiences, and collect real-time data is on. Clinical trial companies like Medable and Science37 are taking on this challenge and beginning the journey into a world that enables virtual trials. Apple and Alphabet, parent company of Google, are also entering this space, since they have the ability



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and reach to onboard a large network of partners, including healthcare providers and EHR vendors.

Matching the right trial with the right patient is a time-consuming and challenging process for both the clinical study team and the patient. Apple has the vast resources needed to help clinical trials recruit patients and monitor their health remotely. For example, researchers at Duke University developed an app, Autism & Beyond, that uses the iPhone’s front camera and facial recognition algorithms to screen children for autism.

In 2017, Verily, the life-science division of Alphabet, launched Project Baseline, an innovative clinical research initiative. The company has recently announced strategic alliances with Novartis, Otsuka, Pfizer, and Sanofi to develop new clinical research programs using the Project Baseline platform across multiple therapeutic areas.

Other companies like Deep6 AI are using their technology to connect to EMRs to find patients who meet a specific trial protocol. Deep6 uses AI’s capability for digesting vast amounts of structured and unstructured data to find the right patients for the right trials, quickly.

Partnerships between patient organizations and technology companies are also starting to have an impact on clinical trials. Antidote, a digitally focused clinical trial recruitment company, has partnered with nearly 300 pa-

tient organizations to enable the targeting of patients for specific trials. Gone are the days of using billboard ads in subway stations to recruit patients for a clinical trial.

On the commercial side, all roads seem to be leading to digital therapeutics. Whether this is for new services that go beyond the pill, or developing stand-alone products, pharma companies are buying, partnering with, or beginning to compete with companies to launch technology solutions that help patients.

Click Therapeutics has an online platform of “prescription digital therapeutics.” In addition to the company’s depression treatment software, Click has created Clickotine, a smoking cessation app. The app offers services such as live coaching, access to nicotine replacement therapy, and personalized messages to keep patients on track.

Boston-based Pear Therapeutics is also another early entrant in this market. The company’s approach is to integrate clinically validated software applications with previously approved pharmaceuticals and treatment paradigms.

Other companies such as Omada and Livongo are providing patients with a combination of digital tools and care teams to change the way those suffering from chronic diseases, such as diabetes for example, live with and manage their disease. The goal of these ongoing efforts is to eliminate the need for medication for patients suffering from chronic diseases.

This is a time of intense and rapid change in healthcare, and technology-powered solutions are beginning to take hold in our lives, enabling patients to manage a whole host of health-related issues. The future of healthcare, at least from my point of view, is bright, and technology is helping to fuel the countless possibilities. **PV**

Editor’s Notes:

¹ <https://rockhealth.com/reports/q3-2019-digital-health-funding-moderates-after-particularly-strong-first-half/>

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