FUTURE FOUR

These surging trends are remaking business as usual. Savvy leaders, be on the lookout.

HEALTH CARE

THE PATIENT-CONSUMER IS KING

Organizations know they must improve the customer experience. Emerging competitors from other sectors have the same goal in mind.
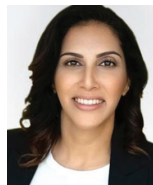
BY KATE ROCKWOOD

Patients are growing impatient. The customer experience is improving in many sectors, but when it comes to health care, price and levels of quality and safety have remained stubbornly opaque for many people.

"You have a consumer who is expecting convenience in every other aspect of their life—from Amazon delivering to their doorstep to mobile check-in at the airport," says Dr. Geeta Nayyar, chief medical officer of Greenway Health, a health information technology company. "That consumer is asking themselves, 'Why not with health care?'"

The result: Consumerization is now coursing through the health care industry's veins. It is not only health care providers and insurers that are attempting to redesign services to improve the patient experience. Outside competitors from the consumer, retail and technology sectors are entering the fray as well, looking to empower patients, improve health outcomes and streamline a notoriously complex industry, while focusing on wellness and prevention.

The race has just begun. Google, for example, has partnered with Stanford Medicine to explore ways to use artificial intelligence to help physicians streamline everyday tasks. UPS is now dispatching drones to deliver pre-scriptions to people's homes. Amazon has recently launched Amazon Care, an app that aims to make health care more convenient for its employees. And Walmart, which for years has dabbled in the health care space through in-store pharmacies and small clinics, debuted a Walmart Health center in Georgia in September that offers primary care, dental and behavioral health services.

But the biggest consumerization prize involves seamless access to data. "There is substantial trouble with people not having all their health data partly because hospitals don't talk to each other," says Dave deBronkart. He is a cancer patient-turned-health-care activist and author who champions people's rights to own their medical data.

Under an international standardization initiative called Fast Healthcare Interoperability Resources, consumers and providers may soon be able to easily access all of their health records—compiling data from different health systems, monitoring devices and other sources into a single resource.

Once health data is better organized and more accessible, the next step is to be able to share it safely and efficiently, and use analytical tools to draw out insights. It is easy to see why Google and Amazon are so eager to enter the sector. Happier patients and healthy pocketbooks are in the offing.

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