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Can a post COVID-19 world be a better, healthier world?

Embracing a data-driven healthcare future today

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If there is a silver lining from the pandemic, it is that doctors have finally embraced digital technologies. Hopefully, this begins a 'golden era' of digital medicine.



We now live in a COVID-19 world, and everything has changed. We now know that our continued existence and the return to any semblance of normalcy will depend on working together as one world, and the currency of this future is data. To futureproof healthcare and our world, we have to embrace data. In a COVID-19 world, only data and related enabling technologies will allow us to respond effectively to the pandemic whilst preserving the relative functioning of society and commerce.

How do we get smarter?

- 1 **Use what we collect.** As former Irish deputy prime minister, Mary Harney notes, "It's been shown by the World Economic Forum that 97% of the data produced in hospitals is never used. That is a wasted resource."
- 2 **Share and combine what we have.** Clinical data including serology and genetic test results coupled with digital location and contact data can be very powerful. Future health passports will likely incorporate individuals' health data, where they have been and will be, and hence their risk of exposure. Sensible rules acknowledging acceptable levels of risk can help the world economy to re-open.
- 3 **Think and act in real-time.** Real-time data facilitates real-time responses, and real-time responses save lives. For some countries, being able to act quicker – only a matter of days sooner – could mean thousands of lives saved.

- 4 **Don't mistake the urgent for the important.** Because of the focus on COVID-19, clinical trials in other disease areas have stopped and we will pay the price in the years to come when innovation pipelines stall. More immediately, vaccination delays will mean at least 13.5 million people in 13 of the world's least-developed countries will not be protected against diseases like measles, polio and human papillomavirus (HPV). Dr Seth Berkley, CEO, Gavi poignantly warns, "The legacy of COVID-19 must not include the global resurgence of other killers like measles and polio."
- 5 **Build trust.** Trust is the shade enjoyed from the seed planted a generation ago and the dividend of patient nurturing every single day. Governments need to engage their citizens on the imperative for sharing data and balancing individual privacy with the 'greater good'. But trust is insufficient in and of itself for global data sharing; appropriate regulations have to be in place. As Rachel Frizberg, Area Head APAC, Roche notes, "We need the right legal frameworks to enable the sharing of data to be able to respond to health crises like this."
- 6 **Medicine cannot be a laggard anymore.** If there is a silver lining from the pandemic, it is that doctors have finally embraced digital technologies allowing for contactless and 'contact-less' consultations. Hopefully, this begins a 'golden era' of digital medicine with routine use of tele-care to expand access to even the remotest areas on the planet and the introduction of Artificial Intelligence into mainstream clinical practice, enabling healthcare professionals to work smarter, faster and cheaper.

Jeremy Lim is a leading public health expert at the National University of Singapore, and a member of the APAC expert panel for the Roche FutureProofing Healthcare initiative. The FutureProofing Healthcare initiative brings together experts from across the world to share data, evidence and insights to accelerate our progress towards these objectives, by tracking and encouraging the evolution of health systems. Follow @FutureProofHlth on Twitter or @FutureProofingHealthcare on LinkedIn to join the discussion on building health system resilience.

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**We now live in a COVID-19 world.
Let's make it a better, healthier world for all.**

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