

Elevating the human healthcare experience

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There's a lot of talk about bending the cost curve in healthcare — after all, healthcare spending reached a stunning \$4.1 trillion in the U.S. in 2020.

But even trillions of dollars doesn't account for the "cost of caring": The physical and emotional toll caregiving can take on clinicians. Healthcare workers are burnt out, experiencing compassion fatigue and even leaving the profession in droves because their work is pushing them to their emotional limit.

The \$4.1 trillion in healthcare spend also doesn't include the time and energy expended by patients, who need to act like savvy consumers to manage their complex care needs.

To bend the industry's true cost curve, we need to improve every human's experience of healthcare — relieving the pressure on clinicians and making achieving health and well-being easier for all.

"There's never been a greater urgency for us to elevate healthcare from the mires of the transactional and impersonal interactions, to the promise of the highly personalized experiences that health and care should really be about," says Rasu Shrestha, M.D., executive vice president and chief strategy and transformation officer at Atrium Health. "It's not about ICD-10 codes, APIs and co-pays — it's about moments that matter. It's about the human experience."

Upgrading technology

Much of the human experience of healthcare is tied up in technology. Clinical staff use EHRs, fax machines and other workflows to make sure their patients get the care they need.

"Healthcare workers are too often forced to use outdated hardware and legacy software systems," says Tjasa Zajc, host of Faces of Digital Health and business developer at Better. "In order to improve healthcare and the human experience, we need investments in IT infrastructure and technology that will make the work of clinicians easier."

While hardware upgrades happen regularly so systems continue to function and legacy software continues to make promises, ultimately automation and AI provide the industry-wide connectivity and efficiency necessary to make a positive impact on workers' experiences. According to the 2021 Internet of Healthcare Report, 99% of healthcare executives say artificial intelligence technology can empower employees to focus on more impactful work for patients and members.

"I think that we will have to leverage more technology to free up all of the low-value tasks that humans do and upskill those humans so that they can spend more time with other humans," says Bonnie Clipper, DNP, chief clinical officer of Wambi and president of Innovation Advantage.

Because when humans have more time to connect with other humans, everyone's experience improves. "Allowing humans to interact is how we demonstrate empathy and listen, which improves the overall experience, especially in healthcare," she says.

Maximizing value

Implementing AI and other technologies is a good way to make a quick positive impact on the healthcare experience within an organization. To make lasting, industrywide change, stakeholders need to continually pursue an equitable, value-based, personalized healthcare system.

This is especially important — and more possible than ever — because of the effect the pandemic has had on the industry, says Dr. Shrestha.

"We need to understand that in this pivotal moment in time, health systems need to function as conveners of ecosystems that truly maximize value, nurturing trust and orchestrating comprehensive health through meaningful partnerships that create real impact on the ground," he says.

He emphasizes that time is of the essence to make the changes needed to improve the healthcare experience for all.

"As it turns out, now truly is the moment we've all been waiting for."

[Read more from Dr. Shrestha, Dr. Clipper and Zajc and see how other healthcare leaders answer the question: How can we improve the human experience of healthcare.](#)