Data is democratising healthcare

An explosion in data is driving increased democratisation in healthcare, according to the second annual *Health Trends Report* published by Stanford Medicine.

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Building on last year's findings about the emergence and changing role of data in medicine, the latest report takes a deeper look at how using and sharing data will transform research, the practice of medicine and the role patients play in their own healthcare.

This transformation is being driven by the growing volume of available data across the health care system, as well as new technologies and industry players that are taking medical knowledge from a human scale to a digital scale.

"We are on the cusp of something that's never been possible before — the ability to truly democratize the practice of health care, spreading expertise without friction wherever it's needed," said Dr Lloyd Minor, dean of the School of Medicine. "Whole realms of expertise, previously siloed, are beginning to open up to more people in more places than ever before.

"It's clear that we have work to do in terms of making this incredible amount of data easier to access, share and protect," he added. "But I am certain that we are advancing toward a future of care that is more preventive, predictive, personalised and precise."

Findings

The report identifies three main pillars influencing the democratisation of healthcare:

1. Intelligent computing

Artificial intelligence and data analytics are rapidly improving as tools to manufacture insights from health data at scale. This is likely to result in healthcare that is more precise and efficient, drawing cost out of the system and eliminating bottlenecks for providers and patients alike. With the size of the AI health market expected to reach $6.6bn by 2021, AI's impact on the medical field will have significant near- and long-term effects. However, as the healthcare industry embraces the potential of AI, it must take certain practical and ethical steps to ensure its safety. Intelligent computing has the potential to make health care more personalized, accessible and efficient, but only if the industry is

prepared to take on the challenges that come with it.

2. Sharing

Information sharing must be improved at a foundational level to allow data to flow freely between various participants in the system, including healthcare providers, patients, technology providers and insurers. While the healthcare industry still faces challenges with data sharing, there are exciting advances being made through collaborations between traditional health care players and new market entrants.

3. Data security

A more open data environment underscores the importance of the security, privacy and safety of patient information. Ensuring patient data is protected will continue to be a priority as the medical industry realises the need to become more intentional about information-security practices and preparedness. Striking a balance between encouraging innovation and safeguarding this highly personal information will require cooperation between the medical and technology industries, as well as with government entities that are becoming more involved in the regulation of digital health.

Source: Stanford School of Medicine

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