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Preparing your lab for the future

The gain from entering the digital landscape

With the clock ticking for fully entering a digital landscape that will benefit patient and provider, medical labs need to act fast. Baher Al Hakim, CEO of Medicus, an AI-based platform that converts data for effective health insights, spoke to *HealthManagement.org* about the whats, whys and, importantly, the hows.

What are the challenges ahead in healthcare IT?

While the centrality of the patient has been on the agenda for years, this direction has only recently been put into practice. Now, decision-makers are trying to think about what they can offer that works for the patient and it isn't because they are trying to meet an agenda; it's because it's important for their survival.

Secondly, we have seen the C-Suite has started to realise they need to evolve – to update their systems and infrastructures to be more innovation-ready – but there are so many areas to tackle that they're not sure where to start. Added to the challenges is there is no one-size-fits-all strategy. For each party, digital innovation means something different.

In healthcare there are few CEOs who have prioritised digital innovation.

What's the medical lab situation?

Our focus is on the diagnostics industry. This is one of the most promising fields of growth due to the assets labs possess, but at the same time, the most threatened. Lab directors only have a few years to decide how to react to the impending waves of innovation incrementally disrupting their industry. The industry is under severe pressure because of rising healthcare costs, and diagnostic spend is one of the easiest to squeeze. The market is really struggling under this pressure and regulations are becoming tighter and tighter.

There are two universes in healthcare; the medical field which encompasses diagnostics, medication and treatment, and wellbeing which encompasses lifestyle and wellness apps. Even though these industries interact and touch upon the same entity – our health – they are considered as separate product categories. They work differently, the reimbursement model is different and even the market treats them as different industries. Medicus believes they should

not be separate and, in fact, they are fundamentally interlinked. We believe we can give labs a way to play successfully in this new reality where the wellbeing category is growing, and there is an opportunity to differentiate and grow with value-add services. For example, labs can start to offer prevention packages, specific condition coaching or female health management. We advise and support clients in that direction. Encouragingly, many of them had started this process before we stepped in.

How can Medicus assist towards innovation?

Each member of our team has experience in the medical, technology and consulting worlds so we have a set of tools, industry learnings and guidelines that help us along the way. We approach clients in a flexible and personalised manner. It is important to first understand their market dynamics, what their main challenges and opportunities are, and what their vision is as this influences their direction. The fact is, we can't truly know this until we have spent an adequate amount of time speaking with everyone involved. This includes not only CEOs and managers but the people interacting with the patients and the end users. This way, we can present a strategy that works across the whole organisation.

We also pay a lot of attention to something that is often overlooked: change management. If we implement a system, how will it flow and get adopted across the organisation?

What advice would you have for decision makers working in the diagnostic industry?

Healthcare management is used to a slow-moving industry but it's simple; forget the idea that there is a perfect strategy and just start your own process. Define an initial strategy quickly, empower the right people, deploy fast then iterate through experimentation and learning. ■



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