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Market potential of healthcare digitization and implementation opportunities in Asia Pacific

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In conversation with Arnold Leung, Founder, and CEO, Appnovation



COVID-19 has escalated the urgency for remote care and is challenging the healthcare industry to evolve – it's time for the entire health system to enter the digital front door. With the trends leading towards value-based and preventative healthcare, healthcare providers are shifting towards patient-centric models to cement their position as market leaders. Approx 47% of the Asia-Pacific population is inclined towards reshaping health care behaviors and lifestyles through advanced digitized modes. Patients expect to be more involved in decision-making while demanding more personalization and cost transparency. Increasing digital disruption across a variety of industries, companies are revamping their existing businesses and operating models in order to stay competitive amidst the imminent digital revolution.

Appnovation, a leading global digital health service platform has embraced the new trend with innovative approaches for organizational designs and processes built around patient-centricity demands. Appnovation's founder and CEO, **Arnold Leung** who leads the company's strategic vision and global growth across UK, US, Canada, Singapore, and Hong Kong share more insight on the future of healthcare digitalization and its market potential with *Biospectrum Asia*.

- **COVID-19 has accelerated digital transformation including healthcare industry. How do you foresee the trend?**

In reality, the entire healthcare ecosystem was already ripe for change. Even before the pandemic, the market was beginning to expect more from healthcare providers. Patients want to be more involved in decision-making, demanding transparency and personalisation – something they've grown accustomed to in industries like retail. The big question in most patients' minds is, "if retailers can personalise my experience while ensuring privacy, why can't healthcare providers do the same?"

We all know what happened when COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic – the world could no longer function in the way it was accustomed to. The healthcare industry, known for their measured albeit slow technological advances, had no choice but to adapt to the digital way of life with the rest of the world. They needed to communicate with stakeholders such as chemists, doctors and healthcare professionals with ease and efficiency to create connections and confidence among patients around the pace at which innovation was happening.

And now that the world has seen both speed and innovation from the industry, expectations are only going to keep rising. The question healthcare providers need to ask themselves is, are they ready to meet them?

- **How do you analyze the driving factors for Appnovation in APAC healthcare and the Bio-pharma arena?**

Asia Pacific (APAC) is home to 60% of the world's population and is the fastest-growing digital economy. It is poised to become the world's largest consumer market in the coming decade. Within the healthcare industry, digital health funding for the first half of 2018 alone reached USD 3.3 billion, a significant USD 550 million more than the total funding in 2017.

In China, pharmaceutical companies have conducted world-class research – developing reputed drugs and biomedicine in recent years. The biotech startup, BeiGene, founded in 2010, is now listed on NASDAQ and Hong Kong. Apollo Hospitals, one of the largest hospital chains in India, launched its Apollo 24/7 health ecosystem in 2020 to provide teleconsultations and deliver medication to a patient's doorstep. Meanwhile, Japan continues to be one of the largest pharmaceutical markets in the world. All of these advances put together help cement the region as a strategic player in the healthcare marketplace, creating massive opportunities in the decades to come.

Appnovation predicts significant growth across pharmaceutical and healthcare sectors with APAC regional offices in Hong Kong and Singapore. The headcount in APAC has seen a 47% YoY growth in 2020/2021, and we are looking forward to further expanding our footprint in the region.

- **With the paradigm shift, what is Appnovation's role in driving effective digital experiences and strategies for healthcare businesses?**

As a global digital consultancy, Appnovation helps pharmaceutical organizations and other players in the healthcare ecosystem reimagine the patient experience they deliver. Our mission is to help them establish a globally known and respected brand while exceeding business goals. We collaborate with our clients to outline strategies that support sustained innovation to create impactful digital health initiatives from conceptualization to development and growth.

In fact, studies foresee a major paradigm shift in the healthcare industry in the years to come. By 2025, APAC is expected to account for 60% of the global middle class, up from 46% in 2015. The increase in numbers and the fact that it is also the fastest-growing digital economy paints a clear picture of this consumer group. They will be savvier, know more, have more power, and will demand both quality and value-for-money in general. From healthcare providers, they will expect easy access to information, seek consultations, diagnoses and treatments that prioritize their lifestyle, preferences and needs.

- **What advice do you have for health organisations to embrace technology and stand out in the new normal?**

A seamless digital experience was the benchmark – now it is table stakes. However, the ability to pivot with speed and accuracy to changing market dynamics without compromising experience isn't just a function of technology alone. It requires every individual in the organisation to embrace agile practices and be inclined to test and learn.

The market potential for technological innovation and implementation opportunities in Asia Pacific is huge, but we also understand that investing in emerging technologies isn't without risk. For healthcare providers, regulatory considerations compound the existing risk. However, providers that truly understand customer's needs and embrace the power of technology to put their consumers and patient experience first, opportunities will be endless.

Case-in-point, we worked with the Ministry of Health in British Columbia and the Provincial Health Officer (PHO) to support a Single Site Staffing initiative among the province's long-term and assisted living facilities. The vision behind this project was to protect the elderly citizens of the province and prevent any additional challenges being added on to those they already experience with old age at longterm care facilities. We focused on developing business processes, digital systems, and real-time collaboration to support the collection, analysis and reporting of personnel data that would allow the health employers to make decisions about provincial healthcare resourcing to reduce the risk of COVID19 transmission between healthcare facilities. Creating a virtual database of all resources when a physical one doesn't exist wasn't easy. However, within a few days, we were able to work with the BC government to consult on strategy, build a secure data pipeline, collect and analyze personnel data from 100,000 healthcare workers. In addition, we also delivered a mobile-enabled, easy-to-use website allowing multi-site workers across the province to enter their preferred employment site.

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