

# DTx Expert Perspective



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### What impact do you expect Covid-19 to have on the adoption of digital therapeutics?

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken many lives and destroyed countless others. It also has tested just about every organization's fortitude, resilience, and ability to digitally transform -- including healthcare. It is clear that we have a fragile healthcare system which has been ill-equipped to deal with the pandemic.

Now that the cracks in the system have been largely exposed at the cost of human life, we have the attention that was so desperately needed on improving healthcare and making it

more accessible and person-enabled. We now have an unprecedented window of opportunity to seek alignment across stakeholders -- sponsors, regulators, payors, health systems, providers, patients, and the community -- who have been slow to embrace digital health before, but can no longer afford to do so. I expect systems like telemedicine are here to stay, and, with coordinated effort, I am bullish on digital therapeutics too.

### How is Covid-19 impacting individuals with neurological conditions?

People living with brain disorders like stroke, epilepsy, and dementia are amongst the most vulnerable populations in contracting the disease and having a worse course of illness. Measures meant to bridge access to healthcare while we are physical distancing are often simply not designed for people with neurological impairments in mobility, motor skills, cognition, speech, and language.

Worse, many individuals with devastating neurological emergencies like stroke and seizures are not seeking medical help out of fear of viral exposure or poor access. Further, there is often a reliance on caregivers who themselves are impacted by the pandemic and can influence the care they provide to patients with neurological conditions.

### With the explosion of interest in telehealth, how can digital therapeutics fit into the new healthcare systems we are set to find ourselves in?

Our current system of healthcare is a house of cards built from a myriad of legacy devices and vestigial organs. There has always been a risk of collapse, and we have seen a series of transfusions keeping the system alive; however, in the wake of this pandemic, a rebirth is finally underway. Through largely an organic process, we are beginning to break

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down the stronghold of traditional systems of healthcare -- “sick care” -- to one that empowers patients to actively participate in their own journey towards optimal health and wellbeing. The time is now ripe for this digital transformation to become systematic and collaborative. Telehealth may just be the gateway for the creation of an integrated digital health ecosystem and person-enabled health systems.

## **When it comes to adoption, what can digital therapeutics learn from other areas of digital health?**

I have three lessons learned to share the pursuit of digital therapeutics. First, the industry needs to stop finding problems to fix with existing tech and instead turn its focus to developing specific solutions that address known and anticipated challenges. Second, we need to reevaluate our relationship with data: generating masses of big data can lead to analysis

paralysis when we should be focusing on insights and evidence that are actionable and add to valuable knowledge. Lastly, the laser focus on regulatory approval as the ultimate validation needs to be shifted, as the real value is found in the development journey. Health economic outcomes and human factor research are just as important, if not more, than clinical efficacy, safety, and tolerability for product adoption.

## **How should digital therapeutics companies be working with patients to ensure that these products truly deliver for those with unmet medical needs?**

The “patient-centricity” mantra is so played-out in the industry; my mind is almost negatively conditioned when hearing it. When I build or analyze an organization’s efforts, I am looking for concrete examples of patient and caregiver engagement in all company functions. For example, in clinical development, did patient advisors contribute to meaningful endpoints

and vet the clinical protocol for feasibility? For medical affairs, did patients describe their journey with living with the condition and navigating current systems of care? For product development, for instance, was usability and the user interface not only tested by representative patients, but their preferences and limitations incorporated into the design?

## **What are you most looking forward to at DTx East 2020?**

I, and I trust all of my colleagues, am greatly looking forward to returning to some semblance of normalcy including professional meetings like DTx East. I welcome the breadth of speakers from digital health leaders to progressive healthcare system administrators offering their insights in panels, workshops, platforms.

There is this one panel discussion I just can’t miss, “Going Digital? – Digital Therapeutic Clinical Trials” (in full disclosure, I’m a panelist).