

(l-r) Charles Lewis, vice president and chief technology officer, and Sanjay Cheria, vice president of strategy and digital health of TELUS Health.



“WHEN INTERACTIONS BETWEEN PATIENTS AND HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS, INSURERS AND PHARMACISTS ARE SUPPORTED BY A WHOLE DATA SET, THEY CAN HELP FURTHER IMPROVE THE PATIENT’S OVERALL HEALTH JOURNEY.”



CHARLES LEWIS

Vice president and chief technology officer, TELUS Health

Technology is key not only to the continued evolution of benefits plans, but also to improving Canadians’ access and care and to keeping healthcare costs sustainable, say TELUS Health’s Charles Lewis, vice president and chief technology officer, and Sanjay Cheria, vice president of strategy and digital health. In this piece, they discuss how technology is integrating healthcare silos and enabling plan sponsors to intervene earlier to improve health outcomes.

What is the role of technology in the future of healthcare?

CL: Technology plays one of the most important roles in the future of

healthcare delivery – how it is practised and how it will evolve. It enables the digitization of existing healthcare practices and the integration, presentation and analysis of data from multiple sources, empowering healthcare professionals to enhance patient care across the healthcare continuum. When interactions between patients and healthcare professionals, insurers and pharmacists are supported by a whole data set, they can help further improve the patient’s overall health journey.

What forces are driving the shift from pharmacy benefits management to more holistic benefits management?

SC: One driving force is the cost sustainability of health benefits from an employer perspective and from a larger societal perspective. TELUS has done a lot of analysis in this area, with some of our key findings included in the 2020 Drug Data Trends & National Benchmark Report. The eligible monthly cost per insured individual increased by 7.6% in 2019, and even with drug coverage, we are still seeing challenges associated with adherence. The same report found non-adherence is high among claimants taking drugs for depression (23%),

diabetes (24.8%) and cardiovascular conditions (high blood pressure and high cholesterol, 16.2%), and these categories represent 28% of total eligible costs. These realities demonstrate a need for more sustainable solutions. At TELUS, we are looking at approaches to address healthcare issues for plan members upstream to avoid costly downstream circumstances such as high-cost drugs, leaves of absence or additional healthcare services. Access is the other key force. Particularly in a world facing a pandemic, access to care cannot always be physical, and there is a cost for physical contact. This is a reality that’s now shaping a plan member’s experience and expectations.

Why is it important to connect all of the complex moving parts of our healthcare system, integrate health services and points of care, and become a healthcare hub for plan members?

CL: TELUS Health is passionate about seamless integration. The Canadian healthcare system has historically existed as a series of siloed verticals. Each provides value, but without a consistent two-way flow of information, true value is lost. It is only by leveraging an integrated view of the plan member together with

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CHARLES LEWIS *Vice president and chief technology officer, TELUS Health*
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the proper level of security, privacy and consent that we can improve the overall patient care journey. Interconnectivity and plan insights empower plan sponsors to better deliver solutions that support a happy, healthy and productive workforce.

What recent innovations has TELUS Health launched to serve plan sponsors and plan members?

SC: TELUS Health is bringing integration to life. As the largest health IT company in Canada, we provide electronic medical records (EMRs) to the majority of physicians across the country and, similarly, pharmacy management systems to the majority of pharmacies, as well as pharmacy benefits management services. As such, we’re able to help connect the dots and facilitate integrated services such as electronic prior authorization. Prior authorization, a high-cost drug utilization management process designed to ensure the appropriate use of prescription medications, has traditionally been a manual paper-based process that requires significant time and effort from the pharmacist, physician and insurer and can take four to six weeks. TELUS Health is currently digitizing this process to reduce the wait time to as little as a few minutes, so these high-cost drugs get to patients and address their health concerns more quickly. Another example is the introduction of virtual care, which allows plan members to access primary care on demand from a mobile device or computer. TELUS Health has also been able to provide our physician customers with virtual care connectivity for their cohort of patients and save patient video visits in the EMR to help maintain continuity of care.

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SANJAY CHERIAN

Vice president of strategy and digital health, TELUS Health

How is TELUS Health supporting plan sponsors in protecting plan members’ mental health?

SC: A growing number of video visits using our virtual care solutions are related to mental health. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), it is estimated that 60% of absenteeism is stress-related; the cost implications of stress for a typical large employer (500+ employees) in Canada are approximately \$600 per employee, or \$3.5 million annually. As this number grows, health technology such as virtual care will not only help to improve access to mental health professionals and ensure issues are being addressed and treated in a timely manner, but also help reduce absenteeism.

Why is it critical for plan sponsors to build benefits plans that incorporate initiatives to prevent illness, support mental health, manage chronic diseases and deliver virtual care options?

SC: Increasingly, plan sponsors understand that the well-being of their employees is an important determinant of productivity at work. Further, a workplace doesn’t exist in a vacuum; employee wellness encapsulates all that happens outside the office as it can have an impact on performance inside the office. As a result, more plan sponsors are looking at additional options for employee healthcare benefits. TELUS Health’s ability to provide advanced digital health tools means we can also take a more preventative approach while helping plan sponsors retain and attract talent.

What strengths position TELUS Health to support all-encompassing plans?

CL: With more than a decade of expertise in digital health technology, TELUS Health is a trusted enabler of innovation across the healthcare continuum. With the ability to present data at each stage of the patient journey, our solutions not only improve efficiencies, but also create the possibility to intervene before a patient requires more significant care. Our commitment and strong focus on security and privacy by design are foundational tenets of TELUS Health and are at the heart of what we do every day as a part of TELUS – a dynamic, world-leading communications and information technology company.

