BIZCOMMUNITY

The opportunities of healthcare in the metaverse

There is no shortage of transformational ideas for healthcare in the metaverse, from using Blockchain technology to properly 'owning' and effectively managing and sharing medical records to the birthing of a 'digital twin' not just for the moment, but also at a future age.

Source: iStock.

The promise of these technologies lies in the power of convergence and will radically change the inherent healthcare silos across the world.

Sheraan Amod, chief executive officer of RecoMed - an online healthcare booking platform in South Africa, says that from the very beginning, digitisation needed to bridge the divide by offering innovative forms of healthcare, therapies and techniques that are easily accessible to all. “It would be interesting to see this come to life in a metaverse world where technology will transcend time and space in a seamless manner in order to facilitate diagnosis and treatment.”

Since healthcare traditionally involves bringing people together in the same room for consultations, medical training, procedures and treatments, there have been physical and logistical barriers to mass roll-outs across the globe. Providing distributed populations with fair access to healthcare has always had logistical barriers for various reasons, such as the actual medical professionals being dispersed in areas where the demand is concentrated.

“The pandemic demonstrated first-hand that not all health-related consultations require in-person assessments and now,

with emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, augmented and virtual realities taking centrestage, it's not hard to imagine that telemedicine access will soon be found on every 'corner' in cyberspace," says Amod.

These services in the metaverse will reach new heights. Empowered by VR headsets with facial-recognition technology and VR haptic gloves, providers and patients will be able to interact virtually in a hyper realistic manner, allowing them to feel like they are actually in the same room together. This technology can surpass any geographical boundaries - a doctor in Cape Town can easily consult with a patient in Cairo.

Enabling healthcare access for all

From a business perspective, technology services companies will need an enabling regulatory environment that fosters innovation. From a population perspective, governments are going to need strategies to foster adoption, which will include affordable consumer access to the technology and connectivity that they need to engage in the metaverse.

Developing countries, where access to quality healthcare is an ongoing problem are going to have greater challenges to ensure accessible healthcare opportunities in a digitalised world.

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Kevin Welman 19 May 2022

It is likely that the democratisation of metaverse healthcare won't happen by default; it will require the interventions and the investments of a government and all their countrywide healthcare stakeholders, as well as a population willing and able to explore and inhabit a new frontier.

"Initially, metaverse medical services will be seen as a second option to physical consultations, but as with video telehealth today, popularity will increase over time as the convenience and cost benefits are unlocked by consumers, service providers, and funders," explains Amod.

Safety challenges in metaverse healthcare

The world is already grappling with significant digital safety and privacy issues; and the transformation to increasingly digitised healthcare will only highlight the importance of ramping up digital and information security.

As it is evident during the latest geopolitical events in Europe, real-life catastrophes are digital catastrophes too, and cyber security is more paramount than ever. As the metaverse evolves and expands, so too must the capacities for safety and security in this cyber-realm in order to ensure that consumers are protected.

Adoption depends on it, and there will be no democratisation of healthcare in the metaverse without the protection of data and personal healthcare information, ensuring its users' safety and security in this new territory.

"The standards of securing healthcare data are progressing rapidly, and there's no reason to think that we won't be ready to protect healthcare data and access in this new digital future." concludes Amod.