

Tech behind remote healthcare is saving lives

The past 12 months have been tough for many, with the pandemic completely altering our way of life in many different ways. This has been most notable in healthcare, says Dr. Ian Braithwaite, CEO and co-founder at Habitual.

Millions of people have been avoiding going to the doctor, with [polling by the NHS](#) showing that four in ten people are not seeking help from their GP for fear of over burdening them during the pandemic. This, coupled with the fact that many will be unable to get an appointment or will choose not to due to being in a vulnerable population, will have long-term repercussions on diagnosis levels and treatment. For example, [type two diabetes](#) diagnosis is down by 70% compared to last year and [research from Macmillan](#) highlights that 50,000 people risk missing a cancer diagnosis as a result of the coronavirus crisis.

With traditional methods of healthcare provision not as readily available, the need for remote consultations with [healthcare professionals](#) is now essential and key to reaching the most number of people.

What's changing?

We were already seeing a trend of consumers moving away from traditional models of healthcare, with many switching from their normal GP services to digital-first providers such as [Babylon](#). Big tech has become involved too, with the likes of Amazon using their dominance to offer online pharmaceutical services to the masses. This shift has dramatically been accelerated by the

pandemic.

Traditional healthcare providers are now having to adopt new technologies at breakneck speed. We have seen tech-enabled solutions, such as remote care offerings from emergency departments and improved patient communications through platforms such as KRY. What has taken weeks to be introduced into the NHS would previously have been delayed for months or even years, and I believe (and hope!) this sense of urgency is here to stay.

As demand for more convenient and differentiated services grows, we will see a shift in where healthcare is delivered. We can already have blood tests conducted from home through services such as Thrive, and AI-enabled physio via Kaia Health. These are just two examples of the work that tech is doing to make waves in healthcare. As each of these novel services develop, we will see consumer power reshape the provision of healthcare services as people ask 'why do I need to go to the doctor's office to receive this care?'

This has never been more true than in mental health services. We know that mental health concerns have skyrocketed during COVID, with half of the UK's adult population reporting high levels of anxiety during the first lockdown. This has seen remote mental health offerings, such as BetterHelp, Spill and Two Chairs providing vital support to people in their own homes.

We have even seen brands that have not traditionally offered mental health services begin to offer these services, with lifestyle sites such as hims providing mental health advice.

Putting your health first

From the patient perspective, lockdown can be an opportunity to concentrate on our health – whether that's seeing a therapist for the first time, developing an exercise or healthy eating routine, or trying to reverse disease like type 2 diabetes.

For us at Habitual, the necessity of providing remote care is especially relevant in the area of type 2 diabetes and prediabetes. In a speciality that already suffers from challenges to engage patients in diagnosis due to the subtlety of symptoms and the requirement for blood tests, suddenly even the previous, inefficient methods have become unavailable. As a result, we are predicting huge numbers of delayed or missed diagnosis of type 2 diabetes this year with potentially disastrous consequences.

For these patients, the ability to diagnose, manage and even reverse type 2 diabetes has never been more of a lifesaver. With mortality from COVID three times as high as those without the disease, the importance of proper disease

management – and the potential of diabetes reversal – has never been greater. With the NHS and other face-to-face healthcare providers are limited in their ability to offer the necessary support, technology providers are perfectly poised to fill the gap.

If, as a society, we can help more people to access the treatment they need at this most difficult of times – to not only save but also improve their lives – then surely that must be a priority. We've already seen the impact of technology and its ability to save lives through vaccine development. We must not forget those other conditions that have suffered as a result of recent times and ensure we allow remote healthcare to save the lives of those painfully in need of it.

Habitual is the UK's first fully digital diabetes prevention and reversal programme.

Article by DR. IAN BRAITHWAITE