

KEYNOTE INTERVIEW

Healthcare's new lease of life



Digitalisation is transforming healthcare systems and represents a significant opportunity, say InfraVia's Vincent Grosgeorge and Mater Private's John Hurley

For the healthcare sector, digitalisation presents a wide canvass to enhance healthcare delivery. From improving efficiency and decision making, to predictive analytics and virtual care, adoption of digital technologies has the potential to reshape the landscape of healthcare and ultimately enhance the patient journey.

In 2018, French private equity firm InfraVia invested in Ireland's largest private hospital group, Mater Private. Since then, the two partners have launched an ambitious digitalisation journey, investing more than €20 million into an electronic record platform. Vincent Grosgeorge, digital and

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technology director at InfraVia, and John Hurley, chief executive at Mater Private, discuss the opportunities and challenges in digital health transformation and how to address them.

Q Before we dive into digitalisation, could you share your perspective on how healthcare fits into the broader infrastructure model?

Vincent Grosgeorge: For us, infrastructure investment is about putting

capital into tangible assets that provide essential services to the community and support their development. With aging populations and an increasing need for alternative solutions to support the public system, there is a growing demand for substantial private investments in essential healthcare infrastructure.

In Ireland, this has been quite a pressing issue for a while, as limited access to the public healthcare system has driven the growth of a robust private healthcare sector. What attracted us to Mater Private, in 2018, was not only its strong position in Ireland, but also its ambition to expand and evolve.

Digitalisation is a big part of that, and this requires capital and long-term ambition.

Q How would you say digitalisation is transforming the healthcare sector?

John Hurley: Well, the digitalisation opportunity is enormous. Healthcare has really been a laggard compared to many other sectors. Healthcare is also getting more and more expensive, and unit costs continue to go up. Digitalisation may be an opportunity to reverse some of those trends, bringing productivity gains without compromising on quality. In addition, we believe that the future of healthcare lies in shifting towards greater customer centricity, with digitalisation being a key enabler of this transformation.

Q How can the industry balance personalised care with seeking operational efficiencies?

JH: We have been a little bit slow in healthcare to adopt digitalisation. But in one sense, healthcare is in exactly the same place as any other sector seeking to become more “customer centric”. It is important that we all acknowledge the ultimate beneficiary – the patient.

We must also fight the tendency to be overly focused on the operational platform. That’s the back end. We also need to have a strong focus on the front end (patient-facing digital platform) and facilitate the customer journey.

Digitalising records is a necessary first step, but the goal is to transform patient care for the better. This is why the most important metric we use is our “net promoter score”, which measures customer satisfaction and loyalty by looking at their likelihood of recommending our services. The real question and measure of success is whether digitalisation has a positive or negative impact on our



Q What value do you expect the implementation of electronic health records to bring?

VG: Mater Private’s move to electronic health records (EHR) is scheduled to drive significant efficiency gains. For instance, caregivers experience a reduced administrative burden thanks to having a single, accessible source of data. But more importantly it is laying the groundwork for the hospital of tomorrow.

The true value doesn’t lie solely in the immediate return on investment – though that is certainly important, but in the strategic opportunities it unlocks: increasing data analytics, automating administrative tasks, enhancing the overall patient journey and simplifying collaboration. In my view, this digital journey that we started is key to position Mater Private as a market leader in the long term.

JH: I think every investment, whether public or private, must demonstrate value. People tend to talk about proof of concept, but we talk about proof of value. The investment in EHR allows us to deliver a more efficient service, with tangible returns in terms of efficiency and productivity. But we are not stopping there. As we continue to digitalise, the real opportunity lies in capturing more market share. The next step for us is building a patient-facing digital platform; that’s the key to really expand our reach. Ultimately, I believe the greatest potential for us lies in increasing our market share.

customers.

Is it impacting on our quality metrics? Is this impacting on patient flow or on wait times? Of course, we can also measure how digitalisation is impacting efficiency on a day-to-day basis in different areas of the hospital. At all times, the process is about ensuring that the consumer is not paying the price for greater efficiency.

Q How can greater collaboration help foster digitalisation?

JH: As the managing team we articulate the strategy, then consult with Vincent and InfraVia’s team. Beyond financing capabilities, InfraVia brings considerable experience of digital transformation, so we look to them as an important sounding board. It’s always a two-way relationship, rather

than them just coming and presenting us with a solution.

VG: We have insightful conversations and openly exchange ideas. Management is always closer to the operational challenges, but we aim to offer a broader perspective. We are involved in digital transformations across many companies and can share challenges, roadblocks and best practices. We are also building long-term relationships with trusted partners that can directly help our portfolio companies. In short, we help mitigate risk by sharing best practice, accelerate progress by offering solutions and connect our portfolio companies with our broader ecosystem.

Q What are some of the potential risks and challenges of digital transformation?

VG: One of the main risks in digital transformation is getting caught up in all the hype. For example, artificial intelligence is very trendy right now, but the risk would be to invest just for the sake of it. It's crucial to be clear on the targeted benefits and the potential impacts it could have on operations before making any investment. Digital is a means to improve the quality of service, boost efficiencies and enhance the patient journey. There's a risk of wasting resources just because you were blinded by all the hype.

The second risk comes in the execution phase. Identifying the right target is just the beginning – achieving it is another challenge. Digitalisation involves multiple layers, and successful implementation requires attention to several complex dimensions. These include human factors that impact change management and user adoption, organisational process adjustments and the strategic timing of executing tasks. Above all, digitalisation should not be seen as an IT project but as an opportunity to rethink the business and re-engineer legacy processes.

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JOHN HURLEY

JH: Like any organisation, we are very conscious of our data, as well as cybersecurity. We have gone on a journey from outsourcing to insourcing. Right now, it's a hybrid of both. We have a core team of cybersecurity within the organisation, led by a very experienced person that came to us from industry, our own chief information security officer. We also reach out to experts in the field for off the shelf solutions when it is required. And then obviously we benefit from being part of the InfraVia family and the advice of their cybersecurity director.

Q Talking about change management, what are some of the methods for getting people on board?

JH: You really have to make the effort to educate people and show all the stakeholders – patients, employees and the doctors – the benefits of digitalisation. For the patient there are some easy ways to demonstrate those benefits. For example, part of the patient journey is scheduling an appointment. If your digital projects allow a patient to schedule their own appointment, they will have a better experience. They will take ownership and be more likely to arrive on time.

Likewise, enabling patients to access their own test results. Do they have to call their family physician or is it sent directly to their phone? Clearly, there are significant benefits to the patient if they can see their results earlier, as long as the results are adequately interpreted.

VG: In my view, somewhat from the outside, there was a huge effort made by the Mater Private team to define a tailored change management programme that involved a lot of training. They spent months providing customised training for nurses, for specific staff and for doctors. That was really impressive and certainly key to success and adoption.

Q What are some future aspects of digitalisation you anticipate?

JH: Greater simplicity. Or rather, network excellence with simplicity. In other words, how do we maintain excellent clinical care and deliver it in seamless fashion? That might be as straightforward as saying we are going to replicate what other sectors, like the best banks, have done to simplify the customer experience but do it in healthcare. This requires looking at where the pain points are on the customer's journey and how can we make it easier for them.

VG: Electronic health records is the first step to create shared access to data for the Mater Private teams. This will allow them to further develop data management capabilities to the benefit of the group and the patients. The immediate next steps will be to develop further data-driven analytics to address those pain points.

Fortunately, there are plenty of opportunities to replicate successful data applications from other industries, which we can implement quickly and with agility. Enhancement of data management is something that we systematically implement across all our portfolio companies. The pace of change is accelerating, and the future is promising. ■



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