COVID-19 has made AI crucial to our health care system. But we shouldn’t stop there
A modern digital infrastructure built specifically for the industry would benefit patients and providers alike

By Kieran Murphy
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It’s no secret COVID-19 has upended the entire health care system. The pandemic spurred clinicians and health systems to adapt quickly, accelerating changes that would have otherwise taken years to achieve.

One of the most significant changes is the rapid development and implementation of artificial intelligence and analytics.

Prior to the pandemic, three in four health systems had developed or planned to develop AI in their health care institutions, according to a study last year by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and GE Healthcare. Three-quarters of those who had already instituted AI said it enhanced their ability to treat illnesses. Four in five said it helped avert workplace burnout, a crucial benefit in today’s hospitals.

Hailed as a strong start at the time, these adoption rates have exploded in the months since the start of the pandemic. Health systems quickly saw an opportunity to put AI and analytics to work to minimize burdens on staff, maximize hospital resources, manage capacity and treat as many patients as possible. And AI will only become more central to how health systems operate.

But this is just one piece of the puzzle. The pandemic and the rise of AI, telemedicine and virtual care has proved the need for a modern digital infrastructure built specifically for the health care industry.

Across the country, we see examples of success and templates for others to follow. In Florida, Tampa General Hospital is using AI and analytics to support a “command center” modeled after NASA’s mission control. It provides real-time data about hospital services and patient care for the duration of each patient’s visit. This has reduced the average length of patient stays, added 30 beds of additional capacity and eliminated $40 million in costs. It also allows hospitals in the area to work together to maximize resources.

As hospitals incorporate these sorts of capabilities, these solutions quickly became indispensable. We have more innovation on the horizon too. AI is already being used to help clinicians speed the detection of collapsed lungs, enabling hospitals to treat the most critical patients fastest. There is also a new study underway to revolutionize the way we diagnose and manage pneumonia resulting from COVID-19.
Now, the industry must harness this momentum and permanently adopt some of the revised policies around remote medicine — and continue to modernize the health care infrastructure. This means convening an ecosystem that leverages the strengths of clinicians, technology providers, academics, governments and others to bring together more data for health care professionals.

We saw this transition coming and have taken it to heart. That’s why we have been building and investing in technologies like our intelligence platform Edison — the foundation of our AI and analytics capabilities — to help providers take advantage of data in new and significant ways. Integrating these tools across the health system will ultimately streamline clinical operations, increase clinician productivity, reduce costs and improve patient outcomes.

COVID-19 is testing the entire health care industry, giving new urgency to our task. However, the pandemic has also presented us with the opportunity to improve health care for both patients and providers. Fortunately, we had already started building the intelligence-based health system. We are redoubling those efforts to make the system better, charting a new course for the future of health care.

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