

Health care democratization underway, according to second annual Stanford Medicine Health Trends Report

December 14 2018



Credit: Stanford University Medical Center

An explosion in data is driving increased democratization in health care, according to the second annual Health Trends Report published today by Stanford Medicine.

Building on last year's findings about the emergence and changing role of data in medicine, the latest report takes a deeper look at how using and sharing data will transform research, the practice of medicine and the role patients play in their own [health care](#).

This transformation is being driven by the growing volume of available data across the [health care system](#), as well as new technologies and industry players that are taking [medical knowledge](#) from a human scale to a digital scale.

"We are on the cusp of something that's never been possible before—the ability to truly democratize the practice of [health](#) care, spreading expertise without friction wherever it's needed," said Lloyd Minor, MD, dean of the School of Medicine. "Whole realms of expertise, previously siloed, are beginning to open up to more people in more places than ever before.

"It's clear that we have work to do in terms of making this incredible amount of data easier to access, share and protect," he added. "But I am certain that we are advancing toward a future of care that is more preventive, predictive, personalized and precise."

The report reflects a comprehensive review and analysis of existing health care research and publicly available data on the current and emerging trends facing the health care sector, combined with insights from Stanford faculty and external health care experts.

Findings

The report identifies three main pillars influencing the democratization of health care: intelligent computing, sharing and [data security](#).

- Intelligent computing: Artificial intelligence and data analytics

are rapidly improving as tools to manufacture insights from health data at scale. This is likely to result in health care that is more precise and efficient, drawing cost out of the system and eliminating bottlenecks for providers and patients alike. With the size of the AI health market expected to reach \$6.6 billion by 2021, AI's impact on the medical field will have significant near- and long-term effects. However, as the health care industry embraces the potential of AI, it must take certain practical and ethical steps to ensure its safety. Intelligent computing has the potential to make health care more personalized, accessible and efficient, but only if the industry is prepared to take on the challenges that come with it.

- **Sharing:** Information sharing must be improved at a foundational level to allow data to flow freely between various participants in the system, including health care providers, patients, technology providers and insurers. While the health care industry still faces challenges with data sharing, there are exciting advances being made through collaborations between traditional health [care](#) players and new market entrants.
- **Data security:** A more open data environment underscores the importance of the security, privacy and safety of patient information. Ensuring patient data is protected will continue to be a priority as the medical [industry](#) realizes the need to become more intentional about information-security practices and preparedness. Striking a balance between encouraging innovation and safeguarding this highly personal information will require cooperation between the medical and technology industries, as well as with government entities that are becoming more involved in the regulation of digital health.

A version of the report, including the executive summary, is available [online](#).

Provided by Stanford University Medical Center

Citation: Health care democratization underway, according to second annual Stanford Medicine Health Trends Report (2018, December 14) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-12-health-democratization-underway-annual-stanford.html>

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