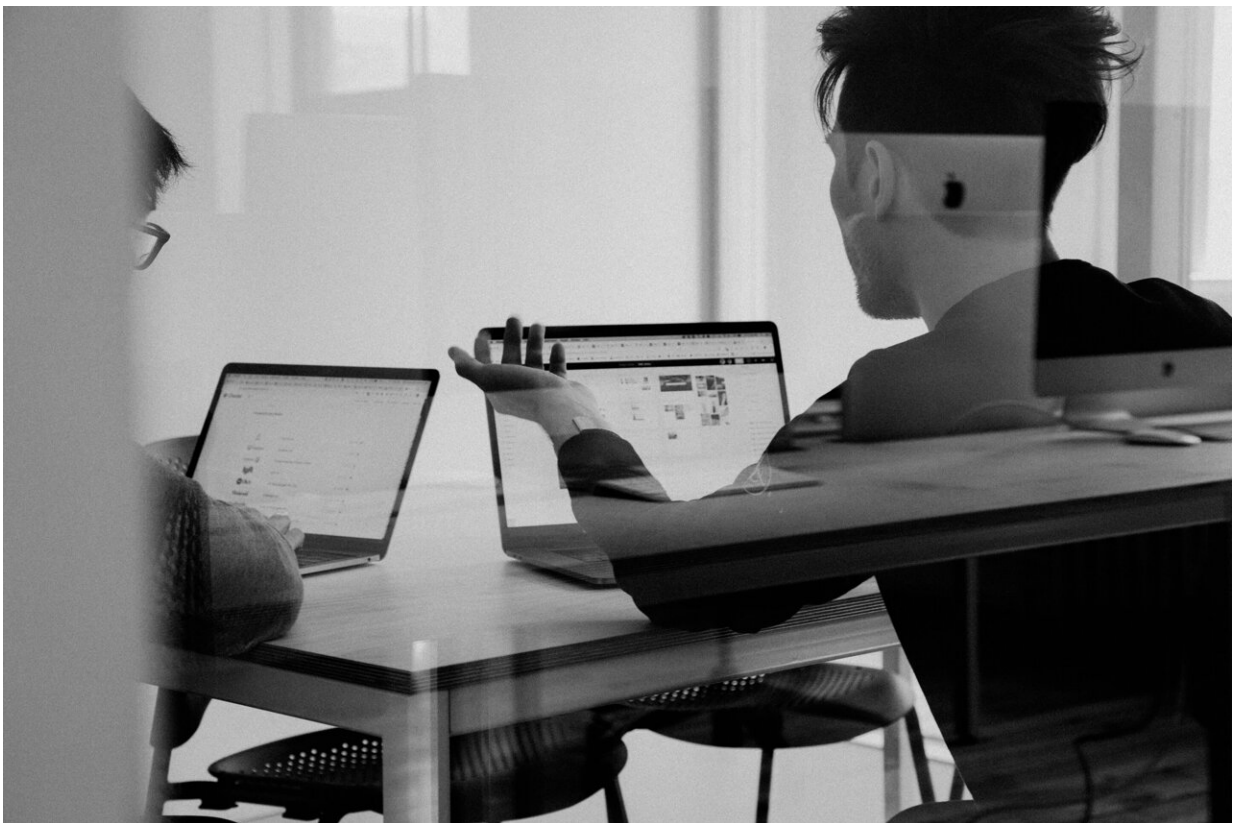


Survey shows that medical technology can improve access, but may hurt employee retention

April 8 2024, by Natasha Gardner



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Artificial intelligence, telehealth video appointments, and other technological evolutions make health care access easier for some, but they also take the personal touch out of medicine and contribute to why professionals are leaving the industry. Those are among the findings of the [2023 CU Denver Business School's Health Systems Climate Study](#), produced by the Health Administration Research Consortium (HARC).

In recent years, [medical providers](#) have steadily upgraded technology touchpoints with patients, such as using mobile apps to check in for appointments or receive test results. But, starting in 2020, the COVID pandemic forced an overnight shift for the health care industry to rapidly adapt to telehealth appointments that doctors were previously more reluctant to embrace.

That pivot raised questions for Business School associate professor and HARC director Jiban Khuntia, Ph.D. "Are we losing the touch in health care?" asked Khuntia.

"What is that balance of high tech and high touch? On the provider side, suddenly they have all these technologies, but don't know how to use them because the employees were trained in the '80s, '70s, or '60s. Furthermore, while infused into the health care, the technology is not aligned to workflows and processes, creating stress for employees."

Adapting to new technology is among the reasons physicians, nurses, and other health care workers are experiencing burnout and marginalization, leading to resignations, Khuntia said.

To gather this data, HARC surveyed more than 100 health system CEOs across the country. In aggregate, these [health systems](#) represent 1.1 million employees and \$284 billion in revenue. Researchers asked CEOs

about the most pressing issues, retention struggles, technology trends, and planned digital investments. Among the key findings:

- 95% of CEOs see [digital technology](#) as valuable for administrative decisions, but only 73% for clinical decision-making, which suggests physician reluctance to embrace technology.
- Only 46% of CEOs believe staffing will return to normal levels within three to six months.
- The CEO respondents identified the most pressing health systems issues for growth over the next year, which include:
 - Non-clinical labor shortage (86%)
 - Cyber threats (79%)
 - Clinical labor shortage (69%)
- CEOs believe disruptor trends in the coming year include digital service models (77%) and health tourism (74%).

These findings help CEOs, physicians, and, ultimately, patients connect their experiences with real-time data. "It's a paradox now," Khuntia said. "The health care industry doesn't have an articulated vision, but is being propelled by big data and machine learning. They want to give unprecedented health care access using technology and be efficient and affordable, but don't know how to do that."

Some in the medical field are embracing new technology, while others are reluctant to add new duties while their bandwidths are already stretched. Amid struggles from these technological transitions and the aftermath of COVID burnout, one in three health care workers plan to leave their job within the next year, and 14% plan to leave the industry altogether, according to a 2023 Tebra study.

This leaves Khuntia concerned about medicine's future. "Too many feel isolated, disconnected, and disengaged," he said in the HARC report.

"Patient portals, chatbots, telemedicine, and virtual care are not the digital deputies of care delivery. Technology is pushing humanity out of the health care experience." But with information repositories, like the Health Systems Climate Study, members are more prepared to address these trends today and in the future.

Provided by University of Colorado Denver

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