

Focus Areas for 2021: Expert Opinion



On 2 March seven prominent healthcare experts met virtually during the Reset 2021 DigiConf webinar organised by HealthManagement.org, to discuss the challenges of 2020 and the outlook for 2021.

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With Alexandre Lourenço as moderator, the panel included Prof Davide Caramella, Dr Rafael Grossmann, Christian Hay, John Nosta, Prof Robert Vander Stichele and Dr Rafael Vidal-Perez (see below).

Reflecting on the 2020 pandemic experience and the lessons learnt, the panellists highlighted some challenges that COVID-19 brought to the forefront. Those included lack of proper preparedness and planning strategies, especially at the onset of the pandemic, as well as inefficient communication, both with public and within healthcare. In terms of resource allocation, in some cases there was substantial lack of necessities, but in others the resources were available but not properly used, with examples here being the deployment of telehealth or the vaccine management.

Much attention was given to digital health technologies. The experts agreed that they had huge potential but their applications were still far from the optimal level. In addition, those technologies were sometimes misapplied while the overall ecosystem was fragmented, which, in turn, is prohibitive for innovation.

One of the prominent issues discussed was the unprecedented vaccination programmes being rolled out across the world. Some of the panellists were concerned that the effort might have been undermined by the lack of proper monitoring, even though the relevant resources and technology were available.

Prompted by a question from the audience, the panel stressed much room for improvement from the management point of view. They shared the opinion that healthcare systems needed to be more dynamic, pay more attention to the staff and patients' needs, and better appropriate existing technologies.

In their final comments on what should be the priorities in 2021, the experts highlighted the need to change the current lax attitude towards the pandemic. In the words of Dr Vidal-Perez, "That's the problem – what the people are thinking". Prof Vander Stichele pointed out that these behavioural changes would also affect every aspect of our lives, from how science is conducted to how people socialise, but "the technology will help us", in his opinion.

At the same time, the leadership and management in healthcare must also evolve because "it really starts at home", as Dr Grossmann put it. "We need wise, flexible, agile leadership. We need to do true innovation and we cannot let the guard down," he emphasised.

Interestingly, this innovation should not be something complex. There are many relatively simple solutions that only need to be used properly, as outlined by Mr Hay who gave an example of adopting barcodes for global COVID-19 vaccine monitoring: "Safer care starts with a simple beep: the barcode," he noted.

John Nosta supported the view that any solution to the current crisis would not be societal. It “will be scientific and that will be driven largely by technology”, he opined.

Overall, the panel expressed hope that drawing on the lessons that healthcare systems around the world learnt in 2020, this year will be much better than 2020.

You can watch the full webinar recording [here](#).

Participants:

[Alexandre Lourenço](#) (moderator), HealthManagement.org EXEC Editor-in-Chief, President of the Portuguese Association of Hospital Managers and Hospital Administrator at Coimbra University and Hospital Centre.

The panel included:

[Prof Davide Caramella](#), Professor, Diagnostic and Interventional Radiology Department of Diagnostic and Interventional Imaging, University of Pisa (Italy)

[Dr Rafael Grossmann](#), Healthcare Futurist, Technology Innovator, Surgeon & Educator (USA).

[Christian Hay](#), Senior Consultant Healthcare, GS1 Global Office, ISO TC 215, WG 6 (Belgium).

[John Nosta](#), President, NostaLab; Founding Member, Digital Health Roster of Experts, World Health Organization; Google Health Advisory Board, Google (USA).

[Dr Rafael Vidal-Perez](#), Cardiac Imaging Consultant Cardiology Department, Hospital Clinico Universitario de A Coruña (Spain).

[Prof Dr Robert Vander Stichele](#), Senior Research Consultant, European Institute of Innovation through Health Data (I-HD), Ghent University (Belgium).

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Published on : Wed, 3 Mar 2021