



United Nations Digital Health Symposium 24-25 September 2024 New York

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CONTENTS

Report on the United Nations Digital Health Symposium 2024	3
Stay Left, Shift Left, 10X (SL210X).....	3
Day 1	4
Embracing preventative and proactive healthcare.....	4
The quadruple aim and the 10X vision.....	4
Innovation in digital transformation.....	5
Leveraging technology for holistic care.....	5
Addressing systemic challenges with strategic leadership.....	5
Dr. Rasu B. Shrestha’s vision: Unlearning to progress	5
Day 2:	6
World Economic Forum insights: An ambitious vision for global healthcare	6
WHO perspective: Laying the foundations for digital health.....	6
Harnessing implementation science for digital health transformation: Insights from Dr. Carolyn Steele-Grey	6
Conclusion	7

REPORT ON THE UNITED NATIONS DIGITAL HEALTH SYMPOSIUM 2024

Chair: Professor Martin Curley, Maynooth University, Ireland

Co-Chair: Dr John Sheen, Specialist Radiologist, Blackrock Health, Ireland

Co-Chair: Ryl Jensen, CEO Digital Health Association, New Zealand

I had the enormous privilege of Co-Chairing the United Nations Digital Health Symposium, held 24-25 September 2024 in New York. The Symposium brought together experts from healthcare, technology, and policy to explore how digital health can reshape global healthcare. The discussions highlighted the critical shift from reactive to proactive healthcare, with compelling insights from a diverse lineup of speakers over two days. Day 1 set the stage with a focus on foundational principles and the potential of digital health, while Day 2 provided strategic perspectives from global organisations and experts in implementation science.

As Co-Chair of the United Nations Digital Health Symposium, I've had the opportunity to significantly develop my leadership skills in global health and digital health policy. This role has allowed me to work closely with international health leaders, contribute to a global direction, and engage with a diverse range of stakeholders across borders.

Through this experience, I've built valuable connections with experts and innovators from countries leading the way in digital health. These relationships are incredibly beneficial for New Zealand, as they provide us with access to best practices, emerging technologies, and new ways of thinking. By bringing these insights back home, I can help position New Zealand at the forefront of digital health advancements, aligning us with global standards and ensuring we can make the most of international connections.

STAY LEFT, SHIFT LEFT, 10X (SL210X)

The focus for the Symposium, now into its fourth year is based off the catchphrase *Stay Left, Shift Left, 10X (SL210X)*. SL210X outlines a new healthcare paradigm focused on using digital technologies to improve global health systems, with the goal of meeting the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal #3 for health and well-being. The approach, termed "Stay Left, Shift Left, 10X" (SL210X), advocates for proactive healthcare that keeps people healthy (Stay Left) and shifts care from hospitals to community and home settings (Shift Left), aiming for better outcomes at reduced costs.

Key elements include:

1. **Digital health paradigm:** Embracing technologies like AI, IoT, and cloud computing to create accessible, cost-effective, and personalised healthcare. This is seen as essential to modernising healthcare, which is currently reactive and hospital-centred.

2. **Leapfrog strategy:** Both developed and developing nations should adopt a data-enabled healthcare approach, utilising mobile and cloud-based records for better health outcomes and efficiency.
3. **Value-based healthcare (VBH):** This approach shifts focus from fee-for-service to outcome-based care, aiming to enhance patient health rather than maximising service volume.
4. **Open innovation 2.0:** This collaborative model involves all stakeholders, including patients, in an integrated ecosystem for innovation, relying on digital living labs for rapid development and adoption.
5. **Trusted data environments:** Establishing secure, privacy-focused frameworks for health data sharing is crucial for fostering patient trust and enabling data-driven insights.
6. **Digital therapeutics:** Germany's DiGA Fast Track system is highlighted as a model for integrating digital health applications into regulated healthcare systems, providing approved digital therapeutics covered by insurance.
7. **Health assurance over health insurance:** The SL210X framework suggests a move toward proactive health assurance models that focus on preventive care through real-time monitoring and personalised interventions, leveraging the “quantified self” concept.

DAY 1

The first day of Symposium, held on 24 September 2024, provided a powerful platform for discussing the transformative potential of digital health. This day, packed with insights from leaders across healthcare and technology, emphasised the urgent need for a shift from reactive to proactive healthcare models, leveraging digital tools to enhance patient outcomes, and prioritising sustainable, accessible healthcare for all.

Embracing preventative and proactive healthcare

A recurring theme was the need to pivot from an illness-centric model to one focused on wellness. The symposium highlighted the benefits of shifting healthcare left—meaning towards low-cost, high-quality, and preventative care. Professor Eeva Leinonen President of Maynooth University, Ireland, stressed that this transition, while challenging, is essential to improving longevity and reducing hospital dependence. By focusing on “keeping people healthy for longer,” we can significantly reduce both the human and economic costs associated with traditional, reactive healthcare.

The quintuple aim and the 10X vision

Professor Martin Curley introduced the "Quintuple Aim" framework at the Symposium, focusing on five key objectives: better care and outcomes, lower costs and higher value, improved patient experience and quality of life, enhanced clinician experience with better quality of life and productivity, and greater sustainability. The ambitious “10X Vision” aligns closely with these goals, aiming for tenfold improvements in areas like patient visibility,

quality of care, and cost reduction. This holistic approach goes beyond traditional healthcare delivery, aiming to revolutionise the experience by shifting care from hospitals to home settings and focusing on preventive measures. It also ties in with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3, which promotes health and well-being for all. Through this framework, healthcare can become not only more efficient and cost-effective but also more equitable and fulfilling for both patients and providers, paving the way for transformative health outcomes.

Innovation in digital transformation

Dr. Kevin Bock from Northwell Health presented on the complete digital transformation of their healthcare system, including adopting cloud-based platforms like Epic and Salesforce. He illustrated how these technologies bring patients closer to their care teams, effectively extending the doctor's office into patients' homes. This approach emphasises human-centred care by integrating innovative technologies such as ambient vision lensing, which ensures technology supports the patient-clinician relationship without detracting from it.

Leveraging technology for holistic care

Leaders like Dr. Peter Chang underscored that effective healthcare systems must provide not only medical services but also a supportive ecosystem around the patient. This involves redesigning health systems to integrate virtual monitoring and expanded ambulatory care, facilitating continuity of care while reducing hospital stays. Such an approach prioritises the patient's home as the central point of care, aligning with post-pandemic trends that emphasise "healthcare anywhere".

Addressing systemic challenges with strategic leadership

A significant focus was placed on the need for strong leadership in digital health. The collaboration between organisations like WHO, ITU, and the World Economic Forum demonstrates a commitment to developing a unified framework for digital health governance. The symposium highlighted the role of leaders in simplifying complex healthcare systems, fostering cross-sector collaboration, and ensuring that technology remains an enabler rather than a barrier to care. The "stay left, shift left, 10X" philosophy, championed by various speakers, serves as a blueprint for this ongoing transformation.

Dr. Rasu B. Shrestha's vision: Unlearning to progress

Dr. Rasu B. Shrestha, a prominent leader in digital health, challenged attendees to unlearn established norms that hinder progress. He stressed the need to dismantle the "artificial digital wall" that separates patients from clinicians, advocating for digital tools that integrate seamlessly with human care. Dr. Shrestha's address highlighted the risk of "broken digital processes" when technology is simply added to existing workflows. His focus was on innovation that makes technology invisible, allowing care providers to engage more meaningfully with patients. He urged attendees to prioritise the human experience, reminding everyone that technology should enhance, not replace, the patient-caregiver connection.

DAY 2:

World Economic Forum insights: An ambitious vision for global healthcare

The World Economic Forum's presentation outlined four core visions for the future of healthcare: **well-being for all**, **8 billion doctors**, **reinvention of medicine**, and **health leapfrogging**. They argued that healthcare has lagged behind other sectors in digital adoption, but the forum sees this lag as an opportunity. With a \$12 trillion addressable market, the potential for digital transformation is vast. The WEF stressed that the current moment is a pivotal "fork in the road" for healthcare systems. There is an urgent need for a multisectoral approach, with strategic frameworks already in place to accelerate change.

In particular, the WEF pointed out the healthcare industry's advantage due to its unique regulatory structures and established frameworks. They called for a shift toward cross-sectoral learning, emphasising that digital health has the potential to succeed where previous initiatives have fallen short, particularly if leaders can adapt their mindsets and operational structures to embrace this change. By drawing on the successes of other industries, healthcare can make significant strides toward more accessible and personalised care.

The WEF encouraged learning from the tech and consumer sectors, which have successfully scaled innovations through cross-sectoral collaboration. This vision for healthcare focuses on shifting from illness to wellness and embracing digital tools that personalise care and improve patient outcomes.

WHO perspective: Laying the foundations for digital health

Derrick Muneene from the WHO underscored the necessity of transitioning from experimentation to foundational integration of digital health. He stressed that for digital health to be successful, systems must prioritise the end user—patients—and ensure they are not left behind. Muneene's message focused on the importance of data portability, with the patient carrying their data across various points of care. This approach fosters continuity and empowers patients to engage with their healthcare.

The WHO also highlighted the need to create environments conducive to digital adoption. The organisation is working on capacity-building initiatives and collaboration frameworks that will support countries in implementing these technologies effectively. The WHO's emphasis on fairness, reliability, and safety within digital health aligns with broader international goals to ensure equitable access to healthcare advancements.

Harnessing implementation science for digital health transformation: Insights from Dr. Carolyn Steele-Grey

Dr. Carolyn Steele-Grey, Canada Research Chair in Implementing Digital Health, provided valuable insights on Day 2 into the importance of implementation science in healthcare transformation. She stressed the importance of understanding the psychological aspects of change management, especially as healthcare systems adapt to digital innovations. Dr. Steele-Grey shared practical tools from implementation science, such as mapping and feedback processes, which help anticipate challenges and facilitate smoother transitions.

She highlighted the critical role of **change champions**—individuals who advocate for and guide others through the transformation process. These champions are essential for overcoming resistance and ensuring successful adoption of digital tools. Dr. Steele-Grey underscored that facilitators play a crucial role in navigating complex changes, helping healthcare organisations move from experimentation to fully integrated digital health systems.

CONCLUSION

The insights from the United Nations Digital Health Symposium underscore a shared commitment to rethinking healthcare delivery on a global scale. Dr. Shrestha's focus on unlearning and invisible technology, coupled with the WEF and WHO's strategic visions, reflects a collective aspiration to move from reactive to proactive healthcare, driven by a shared commitment to better health outcomes, sustainability, and accessibility for all. By leveraging digital tools, fostering cross-sectoral collaboration, and prioritising patient-centred approaches, the healthcare community is poised to make transformative changes. The journey ahead requires bold leadership, political will, innovative thinking, and a unified effort to build resilient digital health ecosystems that can deliver on the promise of better health outcomes for all. This change requires a rethinking of established norms and a dedication to building resilient, integrated digital health ecosystems.

In conclusion, the SL210X framework aims to redefine healthcare as a preventive, patient-centred system that leverages digital technology to achieve sustainable, equitable health outcomes worldwide.

Serving as Co-Chair, I've not only raised New Zealand's profile on the world stage but also strengthened our ability to influence and adapt to global health trends—an advantage that's particularly important given the current strained environment in New Zealand. With government cutbacks in digital health spending, maintaining these international connections is critical. They allow us to leverage global policies, knowledge, and innovations that can help fill the gaps left by local funding limitations. By drawing on the expertise and advancements from other countries, we can continue progressing in digital health, even in a tight fiscal landscape. This network of global partnerships provides us with essential support and insights to ensure New Zealand's healthcare system can advocate for resilient and innovative framework despite financial constraints.