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# Patient as Customer

Futurist **Gihan Perera** looks into his crystal ball and he sees some significant changes in the how patients want to be treated in the new world order.

**After four decades in the same home my parents moved house in 2015. In order to find a new local GP my 80-year-old father searched reviews on Google. Yes, he's intelligent and computer-savvy but he's hardly the stereotype of an obsessed social-media user. Yet even he tapped into the power at his fingertips.**

The past few years have seen dramatic changes in healthcare technology. We've got 3-D printed organs, smartphone ECG devices, predictive analytics, Big Data and nanotechnology robotic surgery. But surely the biggest change in healthcare is the profoundly different relationship between patients and their doctors.

It's become something of a cliché to say that healthcare is becoming a business and patients are acting like customers. But it's true, and yet it would seem that many healthcare providers don't fully understand the effect of this profound change.

Global tech-giants such as Siemens clearly do and they highlighted the fact in their *Picture the Future* report focusing on healthcare in 2020

Australia: "We're changing focus from cure to prevention, from sickness to wellness, from acute events to chronic diseases and – most importantly – from patients to customers."

It's an inconvenient truth that healthcare consumers are customers first and patients second and expect to be treated that way. They expect instant access to information, communication via email and SMS, ownership of their private data, fast response times and the right to review poor service.

And, hopefully, praise exceptional service.

Deloitte's Centre for Health Solutions asked patients about different modes of healthcare delivery.

- 60% would be comfortable with video consultations.
- 55% were happy to receive medical images by email.
- Almost three-quarters would be happy choosing a treatment online based on advice sent by their doctor
- About three-quarters would prefer email and SMS consultations.

In most other industries, suppliers would be falling over each other to service these customer needs, but in healthcare that doesn't seem to be the case. A recent PwC survey of doctors revealed that many are reluctant to hop aboard the e-train.

- 45% said they have concerns about patients' privacy and security.
- Roughly the same number said they don't get paid for things like email, SMS and video consults. There's no CMBS code for all that.
- One in three said it would be too expensive to implement.
- A third didn't know enough to make an informed decision.
- A quarter said it would disrupt their current workflow.

What about you? Are these valid reasons to avoid change – or just excuses? It's easy to find reasons to say 'No', but it often requires leadership and foresight to say 'Yes'. ●