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RPM brings in revolutionary changes in Indian healthcare landscape

Sanjeev Dahiwadkar, Founder & CEO, Cognota Healthcare highlights the advantages of remote patient monitoring and its crucial role in the revolution of Indian healthcare system

Virtual healthcare is on a rise within the healthcare ecosystem in recent years. But the COVID pandemic has accelerated this trend. Amid strict social distancing measures, Remote Patient Monitoring (RPM) emerged as a necessity than an option. Faster adoption of RPM through various telehealth systems, wearable devices, and much-sophisticated IoT-powered software solutions is already underway across the globe. Therefore, RPM solutions sit at the very core of digital healthcare.

For emerging economies like India and many African nations, the adoption of RPM solutions holds more significance than developed economies. Because the availability of healthcare professionals in these geographies is scarce. According to the World Health Statistics report 2017, around 40 per cent of countries have less than one physician per 1,000 people and less than 18 hospital beds per 10,000 people. In emerging economies like India, the ratio is far worse. Every allopathic doctor in India provides healthcare to at least 1,511 people, much higher than the World Health Organization's norm of one doctor for every 1,000 people. The shortage of trained nurses is even worse with a nurse-to-population ratio of 1:670 against the WHO norm of 1:300. Therefore, digital health through virtual care is the best option going forward.

India is already making rapid strides

Given the cost-effectiveness, the potential of wider reach, and scarcity of healthcare professionals, RPM has the ability to revolutionising the healthcare ecosystem in In-



dia. And this transformation is already underway. For instance, India's National Health Policy, 2017 envisions a digital health ecosystem and recognises the integral role of eHealth, mHealth, IoT, wearables, cloud computing among others in the delivery of health services. In March 2020, the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW) of India issued telemedicine practice guidelines, a step forward in the adoption of telehealth on a wider scale. As per the government data, India's National Telemedicine Service - eSanjeevani had crossed the milestone by completing 3 million consultations by end of March, 2021. Currently, more than 35,000 patients are using this innovative digital platform on daily basis across 30 states. The rapid adoption of the teleconsultation platform is transforming the healthcare delivery mechanism by reaching the far-flung areas of the country. Hearteningly, not only public sector healthcare

providers but also private hospitals, medtech players, and other such companies operating in the space are also utilising these AI, & ML-powered teleconsultation platforms to treat patients remotely.

As per the Union Budget, 2021, India's public expenditure on healthcare stood at 1.2 per cent as a percentage of the GDP. In a country of 130 million people, technology can only enable both public and private agencies to provide quality healthcare at such public investment figures. Moreover, medical inflation is one of the highest in India. Against this backdrop, tertiary care hospitals in both the public and private sectors are also using many advanced RPM solutions. IoT-powered software applications are successfully embedded within hardware devices to automatically collect health metrics like heart rate, blood pressure, temperature, and more such critical data points from patients without any physical

interventions from ICUs. Such data, which is shown on a dashboard on a real-time basis, help doctors to make life-saving interventions.

Similarly, several wearable devices powered through IoT are making inroads into the Indian healthcare ecosystem for monitoring glucose, blood pressure, oxygen saturation, weight and BMI, fitness logging, temperature, heart rate, and dementia surveillance among others.

Patient participation increases through RPM

In India and other developing countries, proactive health screening is not as widely practiced as in developed nations. As per data, preventive healthcare accounts for around three per cent of the total retail consumption. This indicates that very less percentage of Indian population spend on annual health check-ups. Even those who are sick with major illnesses, rely on medication and monthly or quarterly visits to the doctors. If key readings change in between, unless it is life threatening, mostly patients would not know. For example, blood pressure rising slightly but regularly would not be noticed until patient is being checked up at follow-up visits. With RPM, such key readings are now monitored proactively and change patterns can trigger early intervention from doctors saving complexities that may come due to ignoring such health anomalies. Therefore, RPM is increasing health awareness among the population and prompting preventing healthcare through early diagnosis; thus, saving time, money and life of patients.

Burgeoning market size

The future holds a lot of

promise for the RPM market across the world and especially in India. As the per capita income grows, India is witnessing a lot of lifestyle changes. In turn, many chronic diseases related to lifestyle changes are also creeping in. Apart from being the diabetic capital of the world, the country is also seeing a lot of heart-related ailments in recent years. In all these diseases, remote monitoring of patients is vital for timely treatment. Moreover, the demographic dividend in terms of more youth population is likely to wane in the next two decades in India. A more ageing population will translate more RPM interventions where health conditions can be monitored from the comforts of home. Therefore, the use of more wearable devices, RMP software solutions, and teleconsultation platforms is expected to increase.

According to global market research firm Fortune Business Insights, the global telemedicine market was pegged at \$41.63 billion in 2019 and around \$80 billion in the pandemic year of 2020. The market research firm predicts the global market size for telemedicine to touch \$396 billion by 2027. A significant share of this market size will be contributed from RPM-related service offerings. As per market intelligence firm Mordor Intelligence, India's RPM market is likely to see a CAGR of 6.4 per cent during the 2020 to 2025 period. As the per capita income of Indian citizens rises with rising GDP growth in the coming years, the country will see more adoption of RPM services. And this definitely brings good news for both service providers and patients.