



Q+A

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Healing with technology



Cees van der Meiden is sector manager of Information

and Communication Technology at Medisch Centrum Haaglanden (The Hague Medical Centre), one of the largest clinical hospitals in the Netherlands with approximately 3,000 employees and 800 beds.

Q: *Looking back on your career, what moment represents a tipping point for technology?*

A: Especially within the health care industry, Wi-Fi and handheld devices have been a tipping point. These technologies put critical information into the hands of doctors and nurses, who have

minutes to make potentially life-saving decisions.

In the old days they had to get a file from the archive. Within the last couple of years, we've enabled authorized employees to easily access patient information from their desktop PCs because everything, at least here at The Hague Medical Centre, is digitized. All the patient information is in the computer system.

Now, we're close to providing the medical staff with real-time access from a mobile device, so doctors and nurses can act on vital patient information in the moment it's needed. The immediate access to accurate, secure patient information may mean life or death in some situations.

Q: *Everyone is struggling with data proliferation, including unstructured data. How do*

you keep from being buried under irrelevant information?

A: How can you combine and connect all this information while deciding what is valuable and what isn't valuable? I don't have the answer to that yet and I don't think anybody else does at this point.

That said, in health care you do have some factors and influences that make it a bit

easier to decipher the value of personal information. For one, here in Holland—and I think in America it's the same—there are rules regarding patient privacy. For example, the doctor is not allowed to share a patient's information without his or her consent. If you're the patient, it's your file, your information.

As such, I'm looking at more ways of providing patients with access to their information, not

necessarily what we can do with that information yet. For example, when patients arrive at the hospital, we could greet them on their phone and let them know we have an app that can guide them through whichever department they need to go through. We can inform the doctor that a patient has arrived at the hospital, and also let patients know that they'll be next in line and helped in about 10 minutes.

A big challenge, though, is how to use information that patients gather themselves. This includes medical information as well as information they provide on social media sites regarding treatments and so forth.

Q: *How does your organization use technology to foster collaboration internally?*

A: Internally, we can use video technology. Let's

say a patient arrives at the emergency room in the middle of the night. Perhaps the doctor on duty is not sure how to diagnose the issue or wants a second opinion from a specialist. The ER doctor has a camera, a speaker, and a handheld computer with the patient information. He or she can make a video conference call with a doctor who is home in bed or 100 miles away on

vacation, using an app so the remote doctor can see the information and help diagnose the patient.

Q: *Incredible. What's the Next Big Thing with patients?*

A: What I find fascinating in health care and technology is the power of the patient. The things we ourselves can do to stay healthy or to become healthy again.

Technology makes it possible for patients to gather their own data, such as blood pressure, in an everyday setting. By using Wi-Fi, they can make the data easily available to nurses and doctors. Combine this with social media and patients recording their daily routines, and you have valuable information for diagnostics and treatments.

We are also looking into ways to avoid the need for patients

to make long trips to the hospital just to hear that things are going as planned and that they should come back again in a few months. Video and audio make it possible for patients to talk with their doctors from the comfort of their homes and still have a real doctor-patient experience.

While this may seem old-fashioned, we have set up online forums, where a patient

can become a member and talk to doctors and fellow patients. In oncology, for example, cancer is a serious topic of course, but other topics may be embarrassing and not easy to talk about face-to-face. In an online forum, patients may find it easier to tell the doctor what is wrong while also interacting with people all over the world. Although we may live different lives, when we're sick we have similar emotions and similar

difficulties. By being able to communicate and share what we're going through, we can work to cope with it. From a patient's perspective, I think that's very cool.