

Telehealth Transformation in India: The Apollo Hospital Study

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Abstract: *Tele health is known as a profitable business model that is accessible to a large number of populations. It is a boon to nations with a vast population, and health services are concentrated mainly in urban areas. Many factors, such as geographical location, lack of health infrastructure, lack of health workforce, lack of budget allotment, and lack of interest, are responsible for the non accessibility of health services nationwide. The major obstacles to universal health care are India's 1.4 billion people, with 70% of the population living in rural areas and limited health services concentrated within urban areas. Apollo Hospitals Group understands the significance of telehealth services in catering to many populations at a reasonable cost. The case study describes how Apollo Hospitals group transformed telehealth in India. It also describes the technology intervention in Apollo Hospitals that makes the telehealth model successful.*

Keywords: Tele health, Telemedicine, Digital health, Technology, Hospital, Urban, Rural, India

1. Usage of the Study

It is useful for the students for classroom study because it brings vast information regarding Apollo Hospital's telehealth business. It is also useful for the entrepreneurs who want to start a business.

2. Learning objective

To demonstrate how a company expands its digital healthcare business from scratch when no one thought of it in India.

3. Discussion questions

- How does Apollo hospitals group scale - up the telehealth service in India?
- How does technology take an integral part in telehealth service?
- What is the role of the government in promoting telehealth in India?

4. Theory discussion

Tele health uses information and communication technology to provide diagnostic and management consultations irrespective of geographical and functional distance. The importance of telemedicine lies in the fact that people living in less developed areas, mainly rural areas, can receive state - of - the - art medical consultations from experts worldwide (1). Telehealth services were available in the world before 1970. Health service providers worldwide knew that they needed to change their operational model to cater to a large population. A surge has been observed in the telehealth service during Covid 19 (2). The COVID - 19 pandemic and the travel restrictions necessitated medical care to be provided to patients in their place of stay. It could be accomplished only by tele consultation, and telehealth has helped public healthcare delivery during earlier emergencies. Both government and private sectors have actively participated and contributed to various telemedicine activities (3). A few corporate hospitals have developed their

telemedicine networks, including the Apollo Telemedicine Networking Foundation, which started telemedicine operations in January 2000 (4). Apollo Hospitals opened a telemedicine branch in Kolkata to cater to patients who come with cardiac, cardio - thoracic, and nephrology patients in West Bengal (5). Apollo hospitals also started foraying foreign markets such as Colombo, Dhaka, Lahore, Maldives, Lagos, Nepal, Yemen, Sudan, and Kazakhstan. The healthcare provider tied up with KC Healthcare of Myanmar to provide consultation, second opinions, reviews, and post - treatment follow - ups besides facilitating tele - continuing medical education programs for the medical fraternity to its patients (6). Video conferencing in telehealth plays a significant role in medical education, and it is evolving day by day with the advancement of technology and internet connectivity (7). It is evident that to address public health issues, the Ministry of Health of the Government of India has taken up standardized telemedicine practice guidelines through the Department of Information Technology in the Government Of India and setting up a National Telemedicine Task Force by the Health Ministry (8). Apollo Hospitals has partnered with the Central Government and various state governments to promote government telehealth services (9). Social digital health scheme 'SEHAT' (Social Endeavour for Health And Telemedicine), which can connect 60, 000 Common Service Centers across the country to a common network and provide healthcare access to millions of citizens irrespective of geographical location or connectivity, was the partnership between Apollo Hospitals and Central Government (10). Dr. Prathap C Reddy, Chairman, Apollo Hospitals, addressed that 'SEHAT' shall connect the largest population of our country on a shared network to avail telehealth services. Apollo Hospitals has always been committed to providing digital health services to all Indians. Following the penetration of digital health services in India and abroad, Apollo Group needed a quality certification for its telehealth service. Apollo Hospital Group was certified with "ISO 13131: 2021" by the British Standards Institution [BSI] (11). Artificial intelligence, cloud computing and machine learning intervention in healthcare has been evident for a long time. AI is used in patient care, diagnosis, and disease

detection, but also in customer relationship management and other administrative activities. Apollo Hospitals group was not far behind in incorporating AI and cloud computing in clinical decision - making. Apollo hospitals launched the Apollo “Clinical Intelligence Engine,” a clinical decision support tool, to be open to use by all Indian doctors on the Apollo 24/7 application. It was developed using the latest techniques in AI and ML. This tool is all set to revolutionize Indian healthcare by exponentially elevating the accuracy of diagnosis, doctor productivity, and patient satisfaction, all in one go (12). Apollo Hospitals Group has been investing heavily in technology. It has also partnered with Google to develop various features, including AI - based assistive technology for physicians in its mobile application (13).

Apollo Group started its telehealth service back in 2000. After spending much time in the digital health arena, it has changed the lives of ordinary citizens in India and abroad. The group has made many tie - ups and partnerships with local governments and other private sector organizations, such as NTPC, to provide strategic medical support. The group has also adopted technology for precise clinical decision - making, improving patient satisfaction. Apollo Group has transformed the lives of patients and the country's digital health ecosystem.

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