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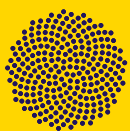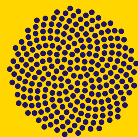# Where Digital Health Thrives
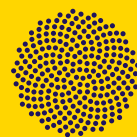
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Getting ahead with digital

Professor Richard Costello, Consultant Physician in Respiratory Medicine at Beaumont Hospital Dublin and Professor of Medicine at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, on the role digital health can play in healthcare

"Digital health is becoming huge. There's still a long way to go, but the healthcare system needs to be at the forefront in terms of digitising processes like the banking or legal industries have," says Professor Richard Costello.

"There's an amazing amount of large device manufacturers based in Ireland. But in terms of SMEs, who might develop low-cost monitoring sensors for example, we need to do more to help these companies tap into this opportunity."

Professor Costello says an advantage of digital health is to improve the patient experience. "

"Patients may feel that their doctor isn't always attentive if the healthcare professional is trying to analyse data and tapping or checking boxes on a traditional computer system. The introduction of better systems to integrate and visualise large amounts of complex data may mean a more personal patient-physician experience."

Patient-focused
Professor Costello adds digital health solutions also allow patients to share their progress and have the potential for remote monitoring, if patients want to avoid going into the hospital. This might be the case in the current Covid climate. "Patients could have their treatment and diagnosis done at home," he says.

This would also help to reduce some of the burdens in busy hospitals.

With the number of coronavirus cases increasing in March 2020, Professor Costello led a team of senior respiratory

> **" The introduction of better systems to integrate and visualise large amounts of complex data may mean a more personal patient-physician experience. "**

consultants from hospitals across the country, to develop a web-based clinical support tool called Enodatis. This venture was in partnership with S3 Connected Health.

"With no treatment for Covid, we were going to always have to rely on best supportive practice," says Professor Costello. "However, the relative benefits of the different types of supportive treatment aren't always known to all doctors.

"We realised the first thing that was going to happen was that hospitals were going to get overrun with patients, and we wouldn't always have enough specialist doctors available."

Enodatis helps specialist respiratory clinicians identify and triage the patients most in need of their attention. It also assists non-respiratory clinicians in the delivery of respiratory care with appropriate data and recommendations to support clinical decisions.

"It makes sure that everybody is communicating at a standard level and that there are no nuances in the level of support. It also means the professionals can avoid going in-and-out checking Covid patients, which can be risky."

Of the partnership with S3 Connected Health in developing the tool, Professor Costello says, "With any collaboration, there has to be a sense of common purpose and shared values. I immediately sensed with S3 Connected

Health, that integrity was hugely important in our partnership."

Bringing the community together
For Ireland to be a global leader in the development and the deployment of digital health solutions, Professor Costello says it's important there's a common forum, like the Ibec Digital Health Working Group, where the digital and clinical community come together.

"The barriers for innovation and development need to disappear, for example with early startups and having a limited amount of money," says Professor Costello. "I think the industry needs to continue to reach out to the academic research community and other common channels, where you're getting showcases, fellowships and industry-sponsored internships.

"It's difficult as a clinician to do research, as there can be a lot of red tape. The clinical tool we developed with S3 Connected Health in a week might have taken two years in the absence of the heightened demand created by the Covid-19 pandemic. So, I think it's highlighted the importance of a multi-stakeholder process that needs to be introduced to support future life changing innovation."

Professor Costello adds, "One thing Covid-19 has done is made health managers around the world suddenly realise that there's not just a value, but a need, for digitalisation in healthcare."

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