

# “It’s All About Me”: The Personalization of Health Systems

FEBRUARY 2014

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Health systems are at an important crossroads. They have experienced unprecedented change in the last several decades, resulting in new ways for consumers to seek and engage health services. Today, access to health information and revolutionary medical discoveries are working together to generate a grassroots demand for personalized healthcare designed around the goals of individuals and populations. While much research is being conducted on personalization through medical discoveries such as those in the genetics field, there is little work that explores how access to health information and shifts in consumer behaviour preferences are creating the conditions and demand for personalized health systems.

The purpose of this white paper is to examine the underlying tenets of the personalization of health systems, evaluate the current state of personalization in healthcare, describe what a personalized health system would look like, and propose ten steps that need to be undertaken in order to create and accelerate the development of personalized health systems framed around health and wellness rather than disease.



## Personalization: What Matters to People

*Lindstrom and Eriksson (2011) use the analogy of the “river of life” as a potential vision for personalized health systems. Downstream, healthcare systems offer disease management, which can be likened to trying to save people from drowning in the river. Upstream, healthcare is more closely aligned with people’s values of health and wellness to achieve quality of life, and is designed to prevent or mitigate risk of disease which compromises health and wellness.*

Personalization in the traditional sense means individuals are able to seek healthcare services and treatment tailored to meet the unique challenges of a particular disease or

condition they are experiencing. Personalization can also be considered through a population-based lens, where health systems strive to achieve value for the populations they serve, namely health, wellness and quality of life. These values vary across population health sub-groups based on factors such as age, communication or literacy, and risk and are based on the unique social, political, and philosophical perspectives underlying the culture of each population. As such, the concepts of benefit and minimizing harm vary across global health systems. Value-based outcomes, beyond those that are purely economic in their construction, are not currently defined or measured by health systems. Thus, for health systems to deliver value, it would require that value be defined in terms of quality of life, health and wellness, as an alternative to the more narrow focus on disease and illness.

## The Emergence of the Empowered Consumer

There is increasing evidence that not only are individuals ready to manage their own health and wellness, they are actively seeking out strategies and tools to take charge of their health and to change the way they access health services. Digital communication technologies have advanced rapidly, providing consumers with unprecedented access to health information. People are seeking out digital tools, online resources, and advanced communications technologies that are most often external to the formalized health system, including virtual patient forums, mobile health applications, self-help programs, monitoring, and tracking. For example, the mobile app industry, which only debuted in 2008, now offers more than 97,000 mobile health applications (health app). Insights from the International Centre for Health Innovation's analysis of the mobile health app market reveal that consumers are increasingly using online health technologies to self-manage their personal health and wellness goals, access health information, and connect with peer-to-peer health groups. The rapid evolution of information and communication technologies has changed the role of consumers in developing their health care plan; consumers now come equipped with health information and toolkits to their appointments with health teams. This is creating a consumer-based system within which people select and engage online tools and resources to personalize their own system of health and wellness that is custom-made to the needs, values, and goals of the individual.

*A recent analysis conducted by the International Centre for Health Innovation of the health apps used most heavily by consumers reveals that there are four primary strategies being used to achieve their personal health and wellness goals: 1. Tracking and monitoring; 2. Coach and trainer; 3. Decision support; and, 4. Disease Management.*

## Personalization in Industry: What Can Health Systems Learn?

While personalization may be a relatively new concept for health systems, it is a common strategy that has been used by industry sectors for years to achieve a competitive advantage and increase market share. Companies such as Disney and Amazon have used consumer preferences and values to inform how they can personalize and strengthen their customers' experiences.

*Realizing that "one size does not fit all", the insurance industry segments the population based on the aging consumer's needs and life circumstances in order to develop specific insurance practices based on personal preferences. In the banking industry, consumers are able to access services online, 24 hours a day, tailored to individual preferences. However, it goes beyond just delivery channels; retail banking consumers are also able to develop customized investment packages through the selection of investments based on their risk tolerance, time horizon and investment goals. Many lessons can be learned from these industries that are applicable to healthcare.*

Personalization strategies that identify and then tailor services to the unique needs and expectations of consumers offer health systems a way to begin to transform the system to a "one size fits one" philosophy. If healthcare can develop tools, services, programs, and organizational approaches to support personalization, health consumers begin to feel recognized and important in their own right, rather than just an anonymous number in a system defined by their disease.

## What Does a Personalized Health System Look Like?

We have identified 10 steps health systems can take to personalize their structures, services, and care delivery models to achieve a personalized system that achieves value for the populations they serve.

**Step One:** Reframe the conversation. People judge their experience in health care by the way they are treated as a person, not by the way their disease is treated. There needs to be a shift in focus from the disease to the person; people should not be defined by their diagnosis.

**Step Two:** Redefine success in terms of what matters. What people really value is their wellness and quality of life. Success needs to be defined in terms of the person's goals, not the diagnosis of the provider or the funding model of the health system.

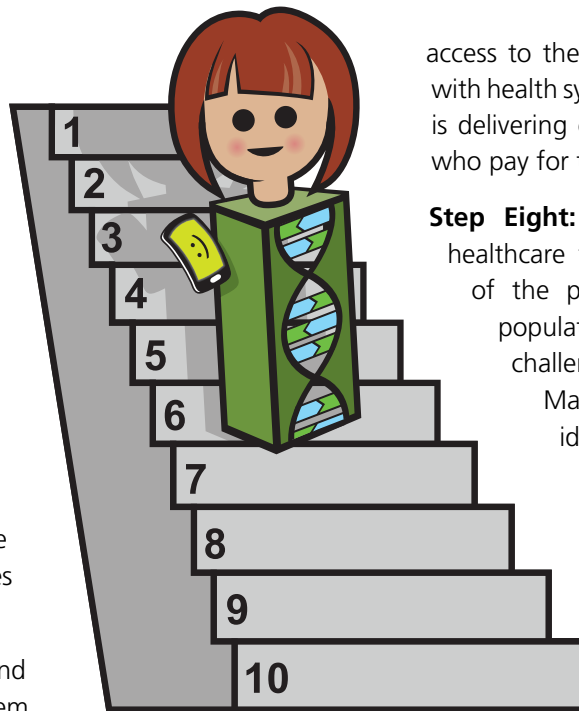
**Step Three:** Put the person in charge of decisions, not the provider. In current healthcare systems, the health professional or health team assesses the patient and makes decisions on the most optimal treatment plan. A personalized system shifts this imbalance to one that supports individuals, families, or communities in making decisions about their own health, and designs care strategies or approaches that are tailor-made to fit with the individual's personal values and health and wellness goals.

**Step Four:** Shift care processes from “One Size fits all” to “One size fits one”. Clinical practice guidelines assume every person needs and gets the same treatment plan, based on best evidence. In short, it is the person that has to fit into the model of care. A shift to a personalized health system will require that current protocols/ processes be implemented in a manner that is aligned with the person’s needs, lifestyle, values and personal health goals.

**Step Five:** Stop competing and start collaborating. Health system players compete for finite resources creating silos and competition. In a personalized health care system, there is an incentive shift where providers are rewarded for outcomes, rather than services delivered. This means health professionals or health organizations will have to collaborate to figure out the most efficient and effective process for achieving population targets.

**Step Six:** Join the 21st Century, and get connected. The entire world uses digital technologies to integrate information except in health care. Digital tools put into the hands of all members of the health care team – including the patients – present an enormous opportunity to create personalized programs of health and wellness. New digital technologies, with all of the security and privacy features used successfully in other sectors, need to be leveraged to better connect people to their health care team and allow consumers to be active partners in managing their care.

**Step Seven:** Democratize information to empower people to take charge of their health and wellness. People need to be given access to their health information. When people get access to their health information, they can make good decisions about their healthcare. When communities get



access to their health information, they can engage with health system leaders to ensure the health system is delivering on the values decided by the taxpayers who pay for the system.

**Step Eight:** Learn from industry and customize healthcare to the needs, expectations and values of the population. Different segments of the population will have different needs and challenges when it comes to their health. Market segmentation can be used to identify the desires and commonalities of sub-sectors within populations. Programs and services can then be tailored in a way that reflects these insights. New ways of accessing health services that respond to the requirements and preferences to each population segment must be considered.

**Step Nine:** Put the population in charge of defining value. Citizens need to be actively engaged in defining value for health systems. The population needs to be a collaborator in making the difficult decisions about what services are provided and what services are not provided, what outcomes the funding models will pay for, and what population outcomes are abandoned when they do not achieve value.

**Step Ten:** Measure what matters. Current metrics used to evaluate health systems need to be augmented and strengthened to include metrics which reflect value for individuals, communities, and populations. This means including metrics that measure health and wellness goals, community health outcomes, and wellness and quality of life into our evaluation of how our health system delivers value.

Health systems are faced with the exciting and challenging need to transform and embrace new innovations to meet the shifting consumer demands for a personalized healthcare journey. Keeping these ten steps in mind, health systems can begin to move towards a personalized health system, where for the consumer, it is “all about me”.

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For further information on the Centre and how it is changing the culture of innovation in Canada, visit: International Centre for Health Innovation [www.ivey.ca/healthinnovation](http://www.ivey.ca/healthinnovation)

