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Title

The Importance of embracing digital health and involvements of dietetics in the tech industry

Abstract

Introduction: Digital health and the tech industry are significantly growing industries that can provide solutions to common barriers faced by conventional dietetics and in-person programmes. Currently, only a small number of dietitians work within this area.

Objectives: Increase awareness of the positive long-term outcomes of digital health programmes when compared to traditional programmes, and that it is a cost-effective alternative. Recognise that dietitians need to grow with the advances in technology and work outside of the traditional scope in industries such as the tech industry and collaborating with app developers.

Methodology: Identify the common barriers faced by conventional dietetics, and how technology can provide a solution to these barriers. Identify current research that shows the improved outcomes for users completing digital health programmes in comparison to traditional in person methods.

Results: Research shows that digital health programmes are providing improved long-term outcomes when compared to traditional programmes, and are a cost-effective alternative. This indicates that digital programmes can supplement the face-to-face offerings, by reaching a diverse demographic of patients who are motivate to make a change but have barriers (e.g. time, transport) to attending in-person programmes. In the NWL OurPath pilot programme, a reduction was observed in weight (6.7% loss) and HbA1c (6mmol/mol reduction) in participants after completing the 3-month OurPath programme. The digital health programme had a higher rate of uptake (>70% uptake, compared with 10-40% uptake) and much better engagement in comparison to face-to-face programmes.

Conclusion: If we dietitians do not continue to build our profile and have influence on multiple areas outside of the traditional scope, these industries will look to other sources and huge opportunities for change will be missed. We can better prepare the dietetic workforce for this industry in the future, through including technology courses within university training, professional development courses through our associations as well as support and mentoring within our professional bodies.

Key references

- Sepah et al. Long-Term Outcomes of a Web-Based Diabetes Prevention Program. J Med Internet Res. 2015;17(4):e92.
- Su et al. Return on Investment for Digital Behavioral Counseling in Patients With Prediabetes and Cardiovascular Disease. Prev Chronic Dis. 2016;13:E13.
- Chen et al. Designing Health Apps to Support Dietetic Professional Practice and Their Patients: Qualitative Results From an International Survey. JMIR Mhealth Uhealth. 2017;5(3):e40.

Key messages

- Recognise that digital programmes can overcome common barriers in traditional dietetic practice, providing better outcomes for patients
- Recognise the potential job opportunities in the tech industry, and need for dietitians to be at the forefront in digital health companies to advocate for nutrition and dietetics
- Identify how we can better prepare the workforce to work outside of the traditional dietetic scope in industries such as the tech industry

