
HIMSS21 Middle East: How Can We Better Prepare for the Next Pandemic?



Leading digital health experts at HIMSS21 Middle East have been sharing practical insights into the best way to leverage technology to manage fresh outbreaks of contagious disease.

Having successfully deployed digital solutions to help combat COVID-19, healthcare leaders are now looking to the future. They believe it is only a matter of time before there is another global health crisis.

WHY IT MATTERS

Using technology effectively during outbreaks of contagious disease can improve outcomes and reduce pressure on clinicians.

The expert panel at the ['Harnessing Digital Health to Build Efficient Responses to Future Pandemics'](#) session consisted of Dr Oliver Morgan, Director Health Emergency Information and Risk Assessment, Health Emergencies Programme, World Health Organisation, Geneva; Professor Mahmood Adil, National Healthcare Advisor, Ministry of Public Health, Qatar; and Dr Najeeb Al-Shorbaji, President, eHealth Development Association, Jordan.

The moderator was Dr Hassan Ghazal, Associate Professor, National Center for Scientific and Technical Research, Morocco, and Adjunct Professor, University Mohammed VI of Health Sciences, Morocco.

ON THE RECORD

"We don't know what the nature of the next threat might be and so we must be able to have an approach that is sufficiently agile to be able to take into account that uncertainty. And we think about this in terms of building learning systems, rather than a single static system for event detection and risk assessment, but we need to develop systems that have the flexibility to learn as we proceed," said Morgan, who is responsible for global surveillance at WHO.

Morgan went on to discuss the World Health Organisation Hub, describing its draft mission as building a system of collaborative intelligence enabling better decisions to avert and manage pandemics and epidemic risks. He added: "What the world actually needs is a much more collaborative way of working as opposed to a competitive environment."

"One consistent pattern that we've actually seen in almost all the countries is that digital health is being used to defeat, and forecast, and to understand the pandemic better," commented Al-Shorbaji.

Adil presented his Applied Health Intelligence Model and pointed out that it was vital to improve digital literacy for managing future pandemics: "In my experience, other clinicians don't have enough data literacy. What is data literacy? It is how you can access, understand, use, and share the data. And I think this is where the crux of the matter is."

Al-Shorbaji said he had learnt lessons from many countries across the region and made practical suggestions to help prepare for the future. These ranged from introducing new laws and new rules governing the use of digital health in pandemics, to ensuring that health workforces were fully trained and making certain that digital health services were integrated into other health services.

According to Adil, effective technology should be made more widely available to better manage future disease outbreaks: “I think, I am personally, and I’m sure we all are collectively, keen to narrow the digital divide...We are one world, and we need to narrow that gap with our concerted efforts and collaboration.”

Register now to listen to the session 'on demand' at the [HIMSS21 Middle East](#).

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