

What Does Healthy Really Mean?

By Debbie Hoffman, Maureen Hydok and Pam Lastrilla

Today, health is defined in terms of risk factors, biometric data and health history. For consumers, these factors may not seem relevant. They might know that being active is “healthy,” but they may not see the benefit of being active simply for that reason. People don’t necessarily want to be active, they want to climb up the stairs without feeling short of breath or run down the street – all things being active enables them to do.

To make health more relevant, individuals must define it in their own terms. This hyperpersonalized version of health must focus on what they want to achieve and their lifestyle goals. Working with a physician who truly understands what that individual wants can help to create a personalized plan to help them achieve their version of health. Defining health in a personal way means that providers must do more than treat people when they’re sick, but work with them to keep them well. This shifts the way providers and health systems interact with consumers. With a more personalized version of health and the resources, including technology, needed to sustain this lifestyle, the way in which healthcare is provided can shift.

Define Health Based on Life Goals

Defining health in terms of whether a consumer is achieving their lifestyle goals today and, in the

future, begins by understanding the individual from a holistic perspective. The process of helping people define what health means for them will provide a high-value experience to the consumer.

To define health based on a consumer’s goals, traditional medical evaluations and testing along with an understanding of existing conditions and family history will still be valuable. In addition, information available through new technologies such as [23andMe](#) related to genetic predispositions and apps that track the quality of sleep and other biometric data should be considered. Most importantly, mental, emotional and social wellbeing, and a thorough understanding of what the consumers’ ideal life would look like and what’s preventing them from achieving their lifestyle, is needed. By aligning health risks and lifestyle goals, consumers can look at health in a new way.

Today a physician seeing an overweight patient experiencing knee pain may recommend losing weight without providing any additional resources or support. However, by looking at this in terms of the consumers’ lifestyle goals and health conditions that put these goals at risk, they can begin to see that the extra weight is causing or contributing to knee pain which inhibits activities they want to do. Instead of just focusing on weight loss, the consumer can instead focus on achieving their own definition of health.

By empowering consumers to understand the current state of their health and how it impacts other aspects of their life, they can define what they want to do and create a plan to ensure their health does not get in the way.

The Journey to Achieving Health

From genetic testing and technology like wearables and apps that track everything from heart rate and steps to calories consumed each day, the personal health information available to make informed decisions is at the fingertips of health professionals and consumers.

As consumers collaborate with their healthcare providers to define health based on their lifestyle goals, data will be a key driver in ensuring they're realizing these goals. However, just like the definition of health will vary depending on their goals, so too will be the way in which each individual wants to achieve their goals. Some may prefer that this data is leveraged by humans to ensure they're being held accountable, while others will prefer that technology becomes their virtual coach.

For physicians, the abundance of data will equip them with the information to align an individual's health goals with a plan that will help them get there. This will enable them to not just say an individual needs to lose weight but look at their lifestyle goal of being pain free while running a 5k and begin to create a personalized plan. Over time, the data they have can also be a powerful tool in looking at their future risk factors and ensuring that consumers are proactive in reducing the risk of health challenges in the future.

Technology can reinforce what a human health coach offers in real time. For those who want to be continuously reminded of their habits and goals - so they can ensure that they can meet them - custom notifications via phone apps could remind them to stand up, drink water or move more often. Similarly, if they aren't following their health plan, they can receive alerts and reminders each time they miss a daily workout or haven't gotten enough steps for a week. In the future, artificial intelligence could even be used to predict what behavior patterns or activities increase the potential for the individual to achieve their health goals.

With this model, the physician is not solely responsible for all aspects of a consumer's health,

they're working with an individual to create a plan for achieving their lifestyle goals. The consumer is supported by technology and their coach along the way, and they're empowered to take ownership of being well. When challenges inevitably arise, the provider, coach and consumer can come together to refine next steps. Ultimately, this means that as a consumer establishes their own definition of health, they have the tools, support, motivation, incentives and ability to bring this definition to life.

Key Takeaways

For healthcare organizations, defining health in a new way that looks at health from the perspective of the consumer can establish a new way of offering care. To do so:

Think differently.

Redefine health by viewing it not as conditions and test results in a global sense, but in a personalized fashion that defines health based on an individual's goals.

Plan differently.

Work with consumers to establish personalized wellness plans and provide the tools and resources to support them in achieving their individual health goals.

Act differently.

Develop strategies that help consumers synthesize increasing amounts of personal health data and leverage this data in defining and achieving their health goals.



huronconsultinggroup.com

© 2022 Huron Consulting Group Inc. and affiliates. Huron is a global consultancy and not a CPA firm, and does not provide attest services, audits, or other engagements in accordance with standards established by the AICPA or auditing standards promulgated by the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board ("PCAOB"). Huron is not a law firm; it does not offer, and is not authorized to provide, legal advice or counseling in any jurisdiction. 18-1532