Amit: Welcome to the fireside chat on the state of healthcare—digital health, health IT—whatever you call it. So I have here with me Abhishek Singh. Abhishek is a good friend and he is the VP at Everest Consulting Group. So Abhishek, why don't you take a moment and talk about yourself?

Abhishek: Sure, I think since the topic is healthcare, it makes sense for me to be talking about the fact that when I started off at Everest group, it was with a focus to incubate the healthcare research practice here. Prior to that, I spent almost close to a decade on the supply side and there was a desire in me to move to the demand side and try looking at how different industries, specifically healthcare, look about technology and how they want to adopt it, how they work with suppliers, etc. So that gave me a nudge to move to the other side—the advisory and research side and here I am. So thank you for giving me the opportunity to introduce myself.

Amit: Sure. Thanks, Abhishek. My name is Amit Shukla. I am a health IT enthusiast first and I also run sales and strategy for healthcare within Infosys. So, Abhishek, healthcare IT and digital health has come a long way.

Abhishek: Yeah, hasn't it? Having back in the days wherein we were just talking about integration of databases, creating enterprise data layer to this day wherein digital technologies themselves have become that default channel with healthcare companies, both payers and providers, want to use as they reach out and work with their own customers, patients and employer groups, etc. So it's an interesting world out there. These days we're talking more about telehealth, AI, health technology platforms, and whatnot? I mean there are so many things for us to be confused about. Since you are still on the practitioner side, now leading such a large business, I would want to hear from you as to how you are seeing some of these technology tenants playing out in your client spaces where you work with them.

Amit: Sure. In fact healthcare is hard and digital health is harder. But you know the way I look at it is that if you have to really simplify it, all the digital health initiatives, whether it's telehealth, cloud or AI or any of the newer technologies that are coming up and the investments that are going into digital health, they all are trying to solve what they called triple aims of healthcare. How do you improve healthcare for the individual? How do you really figure out a way to deliver better care to the population? And how do you reduce the cost? These are essentially the three broad aims, which healthcare companies as well as the digital health companies are trying to address. I'll just take a very simple example, I was talking to the Chief Operating Officer of a large healthcare payer organization and they were talking about customer engagements and their perspective was while some of these new technologies and new channels have come up in terms of portals or some of the other mechanisms, web interface or something, what you have on your mobile, but they still look at customer service as the primary way by which consumers, especially the members are engaging with their healthcare insurance companies. So Abhishek, my question to you would be, since at Everest you guys do a lot of consulting to larger organizations on really balancing their budgets on both the sides—on the legacy side as well as on the investment on the transformational initiatives—what are you seeing in the market?

Abhishek: There are two questions primarily here. One is reducing cost itself because healthcare deals with cost in a very different manner. It's one of the largest spend areas within us. So that's one aspect that most enterprises think and live and breathe every day. A second aspect is looking at the efficacy of the technology costs that they are deploying. How much it is giving them a return on investment is also a question a lot of clients end up dealing with. Most of my conversations in the last 18 months as specifically so during COVID has been around or eight of the SG&A cost as well as the medical cost that payers and provider's kind of end up accruing and how can technology play a role in improving the efficiency of it and also bring the overall level of costs down and help. When I talk about enterprise vendor interactions, most of it is now gearing towards how we talk about not only unit cost of spend but also total cost of ownership of a lot of services implementations that they are putting in place, platforms that they are putting in place and, last but not the least, this whole new ecosystem that is developing of big technology companies - Amazon, Salesforce, Microsoft all are investing in healthcare with a very strong focus, which is creating a problem of 'Plenty for Enterprises'. So it's a good problem to have. In many ways, you can help solve a lot of cost related issues. But then again it becomes a very complex issue for customers to be thinking about.

Amit: Great! So Abhishek, any final thoughts or advice? First advice to healthcare organizations and then advice to the service providers?

Abhishek: When it comes to advice to enterprises is that while they need to maintain the focus around patient-centric technologies, it's the digital plumbing things that sit at the back office or in the mid office that need to be fixed first. Whether it is regulation, whether it is cyber security, whether it's your legacy platform that you have in the mix that needs to get fixed and obviously that data integration needs to happen alongside the data discipline aspect that keeps getting discussed. From the perspective of service providers, and I think that's where the key opportunity will come in, is as we were talking about the sprawl of technology within the ecosystem of CIOs - so they are dealing with large tier vendors, they are dealing with EMR vendors. They are dealing with big tech and SaaS companies. The orchestration of that is going to be the biggest challenge that their key CIOs are going to face, especially the large ones in the healthcare ecosystem. So for you, as Infosys and other service providers who I deal with, my strongest solution is to build a strong orchestration story because some of this headache that CIOs need to solve for, in trying to build that best-in-class operating model will have a strong bearing on how service providers come in and play that central role in managing all of these different pieces of the ecosystem whether it's cloud, data and different platforms.

Amit: Very true! In fact from my perspective, healthcare is now moving into a stage where as you talked about they have to focus on these plumbing based initiatives. They have to focus on security making sure that at the end of the day the HI and security and assurance of your data to your end consumers is not going to go anywhere. So great conversation. I wish we were really doing it at one of our annual analysts' meetings in person, somewhere in a hotel but I think these technologies have come a long way. I really enjoyed talking to you.

Abhishek: Yes, it's the next best thing to being face-to-face. Obviously, something like a glass of wine or a cup of coffee would have made a lot of difference but that's okay to make the best of what we have and I thoroughly enjoyed this conversation.

Amit: Thanks Abhishek.