

Interview with Andy Fischer, founder and CEO of Medgate

We have asked Andy Fischer, an expert in telehealth and remote care for more than 20 years now, about the future of telemedicine, and what impact the current coronavirus pandemic has had so far on his company.



What opportunities does telehealth / remote home care offer today?

Most modern software and state-of-the-art technological tools enable doctors to examine, diagnose and treat patients remotely – by telephone or video. We are increasingly using our Medgate App, which brings doctors and patients together quickly and easily over long distances.

Medgate's app is based on artificial intelligence. This gives the patient a recommendation on whether visit the family doctor or a consultation by telephone or video is advisable to treat the problem. In almost all cases, this prevents duplication of effort. The decision-making support starts even before the doctor and ensures

that patients automatically get to the right place. Medgate's aim is to use medical resources even more efficiently and to deploy them only where they are needed.

What are the key barriers currently?

Telemedicine basically fulfills a crucial patient need: to reach a doctor quickly, anytime and from anywhere. In times of doctor shortages, especially in rural areas, telemedicine is particularly important. In about half of all cases, telemedical doctors can treat their patients conclusively, so that no further doctor's appointment is necessary. It goes without saying that not all medical issues can be treated remotely (e.g.

broken leg or thrombosis).

Telemedicine is already well established in Switzerland. It is as much a part of basic care as family doctors or group practices. Since the start of Medgate 20 years ago, we have been committed to integrated care. However, we still see a lot of potential in the Swiss healthcare system. Through better networking and digital – of course always well protected – data exchange between different care providers, both patient care and cost efficiency could be further improved.

What is the impact of COVID-19 on the trend towards telehealth / remote home care?

In recent months, the coronavirus crisis has posed new challenges for all organizations working in the healthcare sector. Telemedicine made an important contribution to maintaining medical care. Since Medgate doctors treated patients directly at their homes, the risk of infection in waiting rooms or on the way to a doctor's office was reduced. Even during the lockdown, our patients always had access to a doctor thanks to telemedicine.

Also in times of social distancing, it is important that basic medical care is being maintained. This is where we can make an important contribution. For this reason,

the increase in the use of telemedicine is not only limited to patients suffering from coronavirus or the corresponding symptoms, but also for many other health concerns. For these reasons, interest in telemedicine and digital health has grown during the coronavirus pandemic, both from patients as well as from doctors and hospitals.

How do you imagine the future in 2025?

Artificial intelligence systems and other digital assistants will play an increasingly important role in healthcare. As today's patients are better informed than ever before and naturally use digital aids, the hierarchical gap between doctors and patients is reducing. In the future, an app will suffice for an initial diagnosis – no need to make an appointment with a doctor. Progressive digitization can enhance the quality and productivity of medical services, while at the same time increasingly cushioning the rising costs of healthcare.

It will be a challenge for all areas of healthcare to develop technologies that can be connected and work together seamlessly. It is also essential that all health technologies, home care devices and applications are medically monitored throughout the entire development and evaluation process. Whether the ever–

increasing volume of data also brings about a qualitative improvement also depends on how the various service providers work together and handle the data.

However, when it comes to technological advances in the healthcare sector, patient consent to digital healthcare devices and healthcare applications is the most important thing. Acceptance of the technology depends on a number of different factors, including for example ease of use, benefits and trust in the system. Without patient acceptance, technological progress is practically worthless.

About Medgate and the interviewee

Andy Fischer studied medicine before he graduated in surgery and emergency medicine, and worked for the Swiss Air-Rescue (REGA) until 2006. In 1999, Andy Fischer founded Medgate and heads the entire Medgate group as CEO. With the Medgate Tele Clinic, Medgate operates the biggest medical telemedical center in Europe. More than 300 motivated employees have the common goal to enhance healthcare services.

Medgate is also present in the United Arab Emirates, Germany, the Philippines and India. It brings doctors to where patients need them with digital healthcare solutions.

Andy Fischer is also President of the international association for telemedicine and eHealth (Internationalen Gesellschaft für Telemedizin und eHealth, ISfTeH). Since 2008, he teaches telemedicine at the University of Zurich.