



DESTINATION  
**HEALTH**  
 Questions & Talks

## Digital Health & Medical Tourism

**Interview by Artur Olesch**

Artur Olesch, a world-renowned expert in digital health and also a member of ICT&health International team, answered our questions for our magazine. Destination Health Magazine Qs & Ts’s “digital health and health tourism” interview contains information that must be known to the professionals of the sector.

### **Q1. In the broadest sense, how can you define digital health solutions for medical tourism sector?**

In this case, digital health solutions have a few primary goals: to enhance the communication between patient and health provider, to ensure safe treatment and easy access to the electronic medical record to make an evidence-based decision. Last but not least – to support the rehabilitation after the medical intervention is finished and the patient goes back home. In other words, the priority is to stay in touch with a patient before a visit in a healthcare facility, to have a full image of patient’s needs and medical history, to monitor the clients’ after leaving a clinic or a hospital.

I would say that the communication factor determines the quality of care and the patient’s

satisfaction. If patients choose to travel to have a health problem cured, it’s necessary to guarantee a seamless communication with a medical team on the same level as with a local GP. Look how things have changed in recent years. A few years ago, a patient got only a leaflet with some descriptions of the healthcare facility. Eventually, a phone call was arranged to discuss all the visit’s details. Today it’s not enough. Patients want to be sure that they get support whenever they need it. In a digital health era, the distance doesn’t play such a significant role like before. Patients can have telemedicine visits, measure biometrics using wearables technologies; electronic health records can be – in some cases – shared globally, healthcare apps advice patients how to prepare for treatment and what to do after it. Not only doctors and nurses take care of a patient, but also artificial intelligence algorithms can check the potential risk and choose the best treatment scenarios.

## **Q2. How can you create a digital health solution culture in a medical tourism company?**

I think that this challenge doesn't differ from those in other industries and companies. The indispensable element of each success is the creative leader. His or her job is to instill in the employees the factor of innovation. It is not just about creating a digital culture but about implementing specific solutions that facilitate daily work. Digitalization is a long-lasting process of an organizational change, where all employees must be actively involved at every stage.

Managers often choose IT systems behind the closed door, together with IT staff. It is a big mistake that leads to resistance. A recommended approach is to ask employees how digital tools would help in better patient service, what problems are to be solved. This inclusive attitude and a transparent process of change are usually much better accepted than the top-down approach. As soon as the first benefits of digitization are visible, employees will be convinced and step by step a culture of innovation will be created. The decisive factor is always a manager who can implement new products. Finally, there is no ready pattern to use; each case is different.





### **Q3. When identifying objectives for a digital health solution, what the IT manager of a medical company should consider?**

The goals of implementing digital health solutions should always be a derivative of the problems the organization is facing. First, we identify areas for improvement, and then we set goals. They should be specific, measurable, and feasible. But on the other side – ambitious and inspiring, so that you have to stand on your toes to reach for them. It is not enough to say that “we need to improve the quality of communication with the patient.” It’s too general. It is worth considering how to stand out on the market, what can be done better. Goals should not only meet the customers’ expectations, but they have to offer something more. Bold strategies for digitization will require close cooperation with the IT company and tailoring the system to individual needs. Please remember that what counts for the patient is always the final result and psychological comfort that he or she is in the best possible hands.

### **Q4. What are the frequently encountered problems for the implementation of a digital health solution in a medical company? Can you recommend some practical tips?**

There are many, but a good team can deal with them. Most of the problems result from the erroneous belief that a digital health solution is a tool that will improve everything just by implementing it. However, it is only a tool supporting organizational changes and new workflow. I always say that the staff’s skills determine the value of each IT solution. The team can decide about the successful implementation of the software, but also about the failure. I often come across an unfair opinion that “people are a problem” because they do not like to change. The real problem is that in many cases, the implementation process is chaotic, not organized at all. Therefore, most





attention should be given to the training, taking into account people with better and weaker digital literacy. Of course, there will always be resistance. Instead of fighting with it or blaming people, you should solve the problems reported by the team quickly. Only this way, you can strengthen trust.

Moreover, if the IT system is too complicated, unintuitive, it takes too much time to make notes or generate a report, then it won't be accepted by the team. Many organizations fail when it comes to IT project management. The budget is too small, the schedule – unrealistic. Another problem is the lack of strong leadership and a misunderstanding of the project goals. Design thinking can help a lot. Sometimes it is enough to draw the patient's experience map, identify bottlenecks, and put on them IT functionalities that should help.

Finally, if you don't know where to start, it is not a sin to use benchmarking or to see how the leaders do it. You can always get inspired and adopt other solutions to your own needs. It's just the top of potential problems; there are many more!

**Q5. The medical tourism sector needs data sharing, including passport number, the credit card details, or even to personal health data (EMR). While some issues of concern “like privacy and security” largely remain unsolved, how digital health solutions can be implemented to the medical tourism market?**

The short answer is: implement the best practices to process personal data securely, deliver well-designed data security procedures. Choose an IT system that is designed following the “security by design” principle, develop internal data exchange processes, and systematically instruct people how to deal with personal data. Inform patients what the company is doing to ensure data security. People are usually the weakest element of the security system. And that is why - again - the focus should be on training.