Digitalization in service enables better access to healthcare

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In the current healthcare scenario, after-sales service plays a vital role while buying any medical technology equipment. It is the biggest influencer for a clinician today to decide on his investments. For any diagnostic center or healthcare provider, turning away patients is undesirable and one of the causes of this situation is a 'machine breakdown'. This is especially critical in high end equipments such as CT Scanner, MRI Scanner, Cath lab or automated laboratory equipments.

How quickly can the machine be up and running was the concern of the past. How well in advance a clinician would know the problem with his system to avoid a major crisis, is the solution of today and tomorrow. The sheer possibility of getting a pre-alert of a fault is a game-changer. This is digitalization in service.

Remote access
Remote access of equipments is becoming a part in today's connected world and is used reactively as well as proactively. In the reactive mode it is used to diagnose and fix problems when the customer reports a problem and before an engineer can reach the customer place.

In the proactive mode, the equipment keeps informing deviation in performance as and when it occurs while it is in use at the customer site. High end equipments are equipped with this capability to relay critical deviation in performance parameters or errors to a central server of the medical equipment, which is monitored centrally by technical experts of the company. Sitting in Mumbai, these experts can remotely access, for example, an MRI system in Coimbatore, Hubli or anywhere in India and guide the technologist at the customer site what does the alert mean and what needs to be done.

So by remote access a possible major crisis can be prevented. The hospital or diagnostic center definitely will not have to cancel any patient appointments. It is also possible to remotely identify spare part failure under certain circumstances and the same can be ordered by the customer care center so that the engineer can actually arrive at the site with the spare part.

There are situations where the problem in the equipment cannot be rectified remotely. A service engineer may have to be assigned to visit the customer place. In a large organization with several engineers, finding who the right engineer is, whether he is free at that point in time, etc., may potentially take time. Here's the digital solution -- the field service engineers posses a smartphone integrated with the call management system, which communicates in real-time to show his/her availability. This enables efficient dispatch of engineers in merely a click of a button from one central place without having to make multiple telephone calls to find out the availability of engineers. This technology has arrived in India as well.

What happens on-site?
The field service engineer analyses the problems. He either fixes it or confirms replacement of spare part. If spare part replacement is required, he immediately checks the availability of the part in the local warehouse using the smart phone. He orders the part through the app and also announces to the customer how much time it will take for the spare part to arrive and the machine to be up.

In this case, the customer may have to shuffle his patient appointments; however, what he is happy about is the transparency. He knows exactly when the machine will be available for scans and accordingly plans his day and appointments. Just couple of years ago, he and his staff might had to continuously turn away patients, as there was no defined clarity on machine being available. This was a big hit on his revenue and also his reputation, especially among his referrals.

Benefits of digitalization
In summary, digitalisation and connectivity has increased efficiency and transparency significantly, to the way a service complaint from a customer is handled and also has enabled proactive service delivery before a breakdown of the equipment occurs.

About 35-40 percent of medical equipments require no downtime, if pre-alerts are received and fixed remotely. Digitally ordering the spare parts and maintaining customer transparency works as wonder, as the patient is justified with his requirement of access to healthcare.

Globally this is a common scenario, which is now witnessed in India. Organizations like Siemens have been in the forefront to introduce digitalization in service in India for the last 4-5 years.