The Future of Healthcare Ecosystems: The Real-World Impact of IDMP

A lot of lip service has been paid by the IDMP software industry to the potential of data-driven processes beyond regulatory compliance. But the opportunities are very real – and wide-ranging – and pharma companies and their software providers have an important role to play in enabling these advances, through their ambitions for and approach to data-driven information management and transparency. Biotechs, without legacy systems and processes to hold them back, might even lead the way. Here, Frits Stulp of Iperion – a Deloitte business, sets out the enhanced role that could be played by a standardised data-driven ecosystem that's actively promoted by the pharma industry.

For pharma process decision-makers, deep within regulatory functions, it's easy to lose sight of the evolving needs of the people who use their products – from patients themselves, to the clinicians prescribing them, the pharmacies dispensing them, and the payers and insurers approving and settling the bills. Yet these changing needs will and do have a bearing on the choice and use of treatments, their safe application, and their efficacy. And as ambitions grow, to empower patients to have a greater say in and understanding of their own health, pharma companies need to rethink the way that they engage and provide information to the different stakeholders across the healthcare ecosystem, right down to the individuals who need treatment.

Dr. Google Will See You Now

Consider students who wake up with a sore throat or fever, and a mobile device in their hands. Especially after the extended waiting times during the pandemic, their first port of call is more likely to be Google or Amazon than a health line or doctor's surgery. Unless something needs to be professionally prescribed, their choice of medicine will be dictated by search listings, customer reviews and price. A drone might drop it to their door the same day, so that they never need to get out of bed.

Granted, this example is more applicable to consumer drugs, but a specialist cancer nurse once admitted that she, too, would turn to Google to check the specific oncology-related advice about possible drug interactions when dispensing medicine to patients, if that information wasn't otherwise readily to hand. These kinds of scenarios are likely to become steadily more common too, as society demands free choice/for patients to have informed influence over their own care.

This, then, is a call to action to the pharma industry to provide that information in a readily and useable format, and to regulatory agencies to become the 'go-to' place for approved information.

Linking IDMP Initiatives to 21st Century Healthcare

It is in such situations that data standards like ISO IDMP for medicinal products, being implemented currently in the EU but with growing support internationally, offer to make such choices more viable – supported by accessible and reliable information, in an agreed global format, which can be understood by clinicians, pharmacists and the general public (as well as regulators, payers, insurers and so on).

In due course, consideration for all stakeholders will be essential for life sciences companies, and their IDMP plans and decisions today will be instrumental in dictating how well they can adapt to this new world of more transparent healthcare that is centred around the patient.

The not-for-profit organisation, CTADHL, has made it a mission to promote a new era of 'health literacy' through global collaboration and partnerships. Among its activities, it is working towards harmonisation and adoption of ISO IDMP around the world – between EMA/EU requirements and those of the US FDA, for instance, and by the World Health Organization (WHO). We are also seeing a lot more clinical discussion now about the need for cross-border prescribing, aided by an interoperable data set which describes medicines in a uniform way from country to country so that prescriptions from other territories can be understood and exact equivalents identified.

As biopharma innovation becomes more mainstream, and as more personalised treatments feature more commonly, more tailored information on drug suitability and counter-indications will become important.

In the crowded market for medicinal products, the need for custom, personalised products is growing. The absence of new big blockbuster drugs is helping to drive this development, inviting the industry to better understand their patients. Unless each variant of a product has its own data stamp, clinicians won't be able to safely prescribe it. At the same time, patients will increasingly expect to more fully understand for themselves the characteristics of products, the available alternatives and how these compare, and how a given product addresses or targets their situation. Standardised data will be essential in enabling all of this.

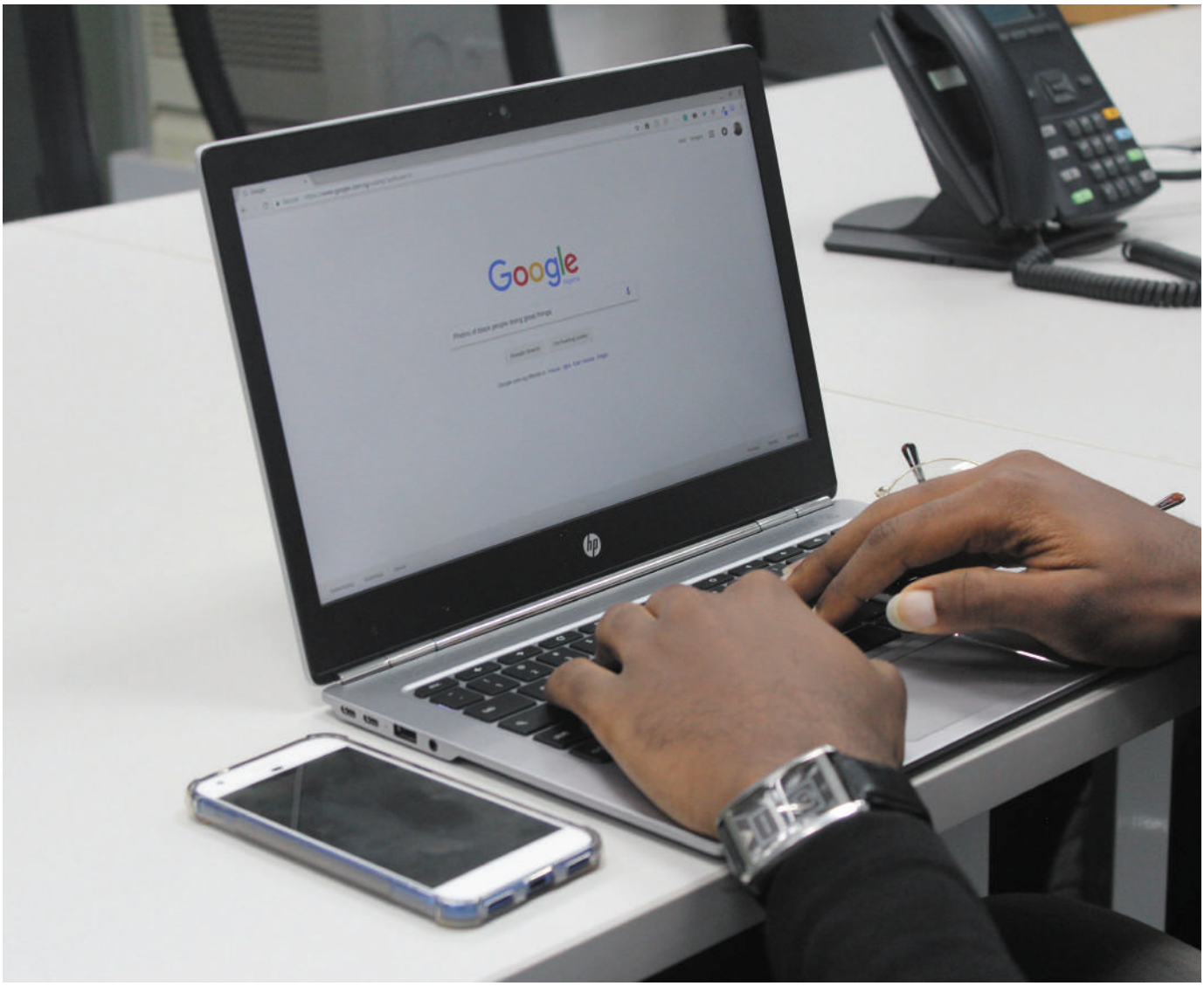
The Road Ahead

So where are pharma companies today in regard to this new global, data-enabled healthcare ecosystem, which places the patient at the centre?

Although some pharma companies are making the right noises about patient centricity today and working hard to provide better resources for their customers, in many cases the gap between the information provided by pharma brands and that patients actually need and receive remains considerable.

Too often, patient information leaflets and equivalent digital resources are treated as marketing material or compliance-oriented activity, rather than something that empowers patients to make informed choices. Currently, it tends to be the market regulators – as labelling/leaflet gatekeepers and public guardians – rather than the pharma companies themselves that are advocating for patient-centricity in published patient information.

To change the emphasis, software needs to embrace and promote use of data standards, enabling better insights, actionable reporting on adverse drug events, product shortages, and more. This rich and actionable data, and reliable data analytics, are crucial to enable improved, safer medicines.



Keeping a broad perspective when rolling out IDMP projects is an important first step in staying open to optimal external information provision and international data exchange across national, regional and global healthcare ecosystems. Other opportunities include greater integration with patient forums, where allowed, so that pharma companies can meet current and future customers where they are and provide relevant and helpful information to them at the point of need.

Understanding what patients – and other stakeholders across the healthcare environment – need is critical. The European Medicines Agency, which has an active interest in patient advocacy, aims to help here, by facilitating conversations between healthcare providers, pharma companies and patients, towards better outcomes for all.

Trailblazers Required

For pharma companies, proactive interventions in the form of better external information which is fit for purpose will help build stronger and more trusted relationships, by demonstrating that their priority and focus is the health and wellbeing of patients.

But it could well be biotechs/biopharma start-ups that show the way. Their relative freedom, unencumbered by legacy products, data and regulatory records, is likely to accelerate their progress. These companies won't be as dependent on expensive, specialist tools, but will be able to take advantage of a fresh approach to object-based information, external collaboration and harmonised data exchange, underpinned by IDMP. This is something all companies must embrace anyway, so it makes sense that these more dynamic, younger companies might take data-based process innovation a step further – and provide an example for the wider industry to follow.

Frits Stulp

Frits Stulp is Managing Director of Iperion – a Deloitte business – where he leads a team of regulatory/IDMP experts active in various projects to deliver value to both pharmaceutical companies as well as regulators. In addition to having more than two decades' industry and consultancy experience, Frits is regarded internationally as a subject matter expert on IDMP and he proactively shares his rich knowledge and experience wherever he can. Iperion, now part of Deloitte, is a globally operating life sciences consultancy firm which is paving the way to digital healthcare, by supporting standardisation and ensuring the right technology, systems and processes are in place to enable insightful business decision-making and innovation.

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