

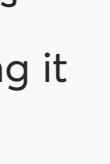
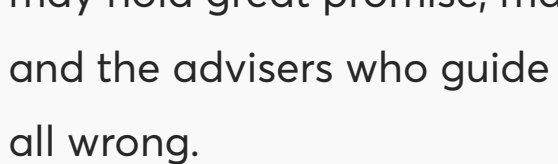


How should tech and AI help cut healthcare costs? Many employers, advisers are doing it all wrong

By **Walden Siew**

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NASHVILLE — While the use of telemedicine and artificial intelligence to reduce healthcare costs may hold great promise, many U.S. employers — and the advisers who guide them — are doing it all wrong.

That's the conclusion of top healthcare and benefit advisers who say using technology and AI will hold a key role in solving the vexing problem of rising healthcare costs in America.

As a consultant, Curtis Cannon, managing partner at Axis Recovery, says he sees many brokers who lack a complete tech and data plan to create long-term strategies for healthcare cost containment for their clients.

There's an "emerging gap in strategy — or the lack thereof. A lot of brokers have a bolt-on mindset, where you just grab something off the shelf, no matter what the data says," Cannon said Friday during the closing panel at *Employee Benefit Adviser's* Workplace Benefits Renaissance conference. "What's really critical is to have a long-term strategy on cost containment using data, because without data, you'll just be another guy with an opinion."

Julian Lago, president of Benezon, a national healthcare advocacy firm, and Dante Cook, partnerships and alliances manager at Springbuk, a healthcare analytics software firm, who also spoke on the conference panel, said they see a world where emerging data will result in tremendous transparency for consumers — and a dizzying array of options.

"In a macro sense, the world always moves from bundling to unbundling, but eventually it will all bundle back up," Cook said, using the cable TV industry as an example. "You went to a cable network and you buy a whole package, and they give you all the channels. But now you say, I don't want the whole network. I want this channel and this channel and that subscription. So how do we build packages, models, for our consumers and the members within our plan to choose whatever package they'd like to?"

Cook said with current innovation and technology, consumers want to connect into the healthcare system via mobile devices.

"Via chat is the first layer, and then via telephone, and then via **telemedicine** or virtual care, and then primary care, and then urgent care, and then specialty care — and then the emergency room. But there are seven different ways that they should be able to access their healthcare."

What does **the future look like?**

Employers will need to address consumers who prize simplification.

"Have one app that controls the vertical of your life," Cook said. "When it's music, it's Spotify or Apple Music. When it's entertainment, it's Netflix or Hulu. When it's finance, it's Mint."

The same should apply for employees in the workplace who are trying to manage their own healthcare plans and medical profiles, but instead workers have too many strategies, tools and apps to access, Cook concluded.

"They should have one solution that owns the healthcare vertical of their life, because we do it in every other place in our life," Cook said.

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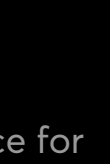
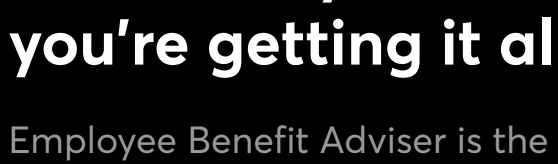
Benezon's Lago also sees a greater role for telemedicine going forward.

"Placing telemedicine on the mobile app allowing for AI reminders and point of care notifications can be an excellent way to increase usage," he said after the panel. "[T]elemedicine is immediately available and a convenient use of healthcare, saving time and money for both members and employers."

Do you agree with Dante Cook and the panel?

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#WBR2019.



Walden Siew

Walden Siew is editor-in-chief of the Employee Benefits Group at SourceMedia.

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