



HEALTH CARE

Building Up Health Care Innovation

BY JOHANNA CANO, POSTED APR 19, 2019

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Chris Hillier, NHRMC executive director of innovation

When New Hanover Regional Medical Center launched its Innovation Center last year, it sought to foster and test creative ideas for improving health and wellness, according to a news release.

To build the program and ensure those goals are met, NHRMC partnered with tekMountain, an incubator that offers space for entrepreneurs, and hired Chris Hillier as its executive director of innovation.

Hillier holds a doctorate in pharmacology from the University of Leicester and is a former professor of physiology at Glasgow Caledonian University. He is also the former senior director of innovation at Florida Blue.

As a technology entrepreneur, Hillier has experience starting and managing several health-related businesses including Biopta, a pharmaceutical contract research company that specializes in human tissue testing, and Sistemic, a Scotland-based biotechnology company.

He is also the co-founder of Angry Health, GIRI and 4R.

In his position at the Innovation Center, Hillier has been examining which new technologies should be adopted and which have the potential to be disrupted.

Hillier presented at last year's Cucalorus Connect conference, where he described how technology is affecting the health care industry.

Cucalorus announced this month that NHRMC will be a Visionary Sponsor at this year's festival in November. Century 21 Sweyer & Associates will be an Innovation Sponsor.

"As culture, society and business are struggling to keep up with new powerful technologies able to influence almost every part of our lives, we, more than ever, need to understand how the future will look," Hillier said in a news release. "This is where, to me, the Cucalorus Festival is a jewel in the crown of Wilmington's calendar."

Hillier recently shared details about some of the work going on at the NHRMC Innovation Center and his outlook on health-related technology.

What is the NHRMC Innovation Center currently working on?

Hillier: "There are a number of current ongoing activities, including the launch of our 10-week Speed of Health program with five teams developing new business models for their own projects that create positive health outcomes. We're also developing a number of projects focused on digital technologies and how new technologies like avatars and sensors can be combined to create new living and working spaces that will benefit our patients and community."

How can health innovation help health care providers and patients?

Hillier: "We need to keep improving on our existing services and approaches as we serve even greater numbers of people. Our dedicated staff are working harder than ever to ensure everyone receives quality care. So we need to innovate on our processes and use of technology to support them in their efforts and ensure they can spend even more quality time with patients."

What is a recent technological innovation that interests you or that you are excited about?

Hillier: "This week we've been hosting Marie Johnson, CEO of the Center for Digital Business in Canberra, Australia, former Innovative CIO of the Year and one of Australia Financial Review's top 100 Most Influential Women. Marie created the world's first digital human able to react and respond to real conversations with patients and provide them with companionship, accurate information and support 24 hours a day from their phone, tablet or laptop. This kind of digital interface is going to be ubiquitous soon, and I'm so excited to be bringing this world-leading technology to Wilmington."

Can technology make health care more affordable?

Hillier: "Yes, absolutely. This is one of the main drivers for both providers and payers. Both are seeing costs like drug prices spiral out of control and are looking at how to reduce this burden on patients. Technology can simplify and scale many simple tasks as well as use high-powered computers to identify ways to prevent illness in the first place. There is really no end to the way it can help. We just have to be careful not to use technology just for its own sake. It has to be of benefit to our patients."

Any updates on the health innovation during a disaster event that you mentioned during the 2018 Cucalorus Connect event?

Hillier: "Thank you for asking. I have been investigating the feasibility of such an event and had conversations with a number of colleagues in other centers affected by previous natural disasters. There is no current slot for the event in 2019 but perhaps in 2020."

What is one of the biggest challenges when it comes to implementing health technology in health care facilities?

Hillier: "Often the biggest challenge is with the culture of the organization and their ability to accept and embrace change. History is littered with companies like Blockbuster, Nokia and others who have not been able to do that. We are very fortunate that NHRMC has embraced and carefully managed innovation as an important part of our overall strategy to ensure our patients and community will always have leading health care. This was already well established before I arrived, and I've been just overwhelmed by the level of commitment to do this."

What older technology methods do you think will be disrupted in the near future?

Hillier: "That is a good question. There are a few candidates but the one that is exciting me is the development of wearable sensors that take the current Fitbit and Apple Watch technologies to the next level. We are now able to replicate the clinical accuracy of sensitive technologies like MRI with much simpler wearable technology. This is going to be a huge game changer in hospitals.

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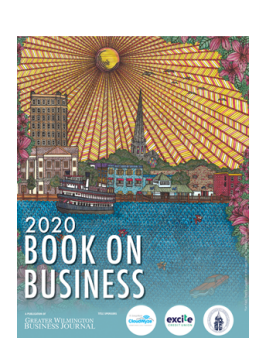


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