

## **Digital health: providing opportunities for advocacy groups and a community for patients** <sup>[1]</sup>

### Patient Perspectives <sup>[2]</sup>

The digital world has revolutionized the accessibility of health information for people across the globe. Patients no longer must wait for doctors' appointments to begin their diagnosis process. Within a matter of seconds, they can have search results from sites across the internet on everything from the common cold to multiple sclerosis. This power to equip ourselves with instantaneous knowledge is transformative in developing patient understanding of chronic conditions. But how can we harness this to ensure that patients receive reliable and constructive information?

Neil Johnson, the executive director of a heart and stroke charity in Ireland called Croí, believes that digital and social media are hugely important tools for a vast number of patients – and also a way for advocacy groups like Croí to communicate with these patients directly. Media found and consumed through the internet can play a key role in patient education, self-care, disease management and therapy compliance. Social media also enables advocacy groups to create wider-reaching networks such as the International Heart Hub (iHHub), of which Croí is a member. iHHub is the first global nonprofit organization that brings together and supports the creation of patient groups from every country in the world to raise awareness about heart failure and improve lives.

The advent of social media has given us the capacity to reach patients who may have no immediate support system. It is the goal of any advocacy group to connect with as many patients as possible, and leave no one untouched or feeling that they are battling their condition alone. Today's digital world allows us to do this.

**Neil Johnson**, executive director of Croí

## **So what's next?**

Digital technology has greatly contributed to improvements in patient care and monitoring, as well as patient communication with primary caregivers, general practitioners and specialists. As we experience further advances in areas like telemedicine, there will be real opportunity for all patients to connect with highly specialized healthcare professionals, whether they are down the street or across the globe. It will be exciting to see how patient advocacy groups can help shape communication around these advances and enable patients to gain the support that they need.

There is a vast spectrum of needs across different chronic diseases, but overall, we face huge awareness and education gaps that must be addressed urgently. By supporting patient

organizations in providing this knowledge in a way that is readily accessible and relatable for people across the globe, healthcare organizations like Novartis can make a real difference to improve patient outcomes and quality of life.

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