Foreword

It is a particular privilege to write the foreword for this important volume. To a certain extent the title of this Handbook belies its content. This is a book about health care solutions – an important contribution that provides tantalising demonstrations of some of the coming disruptors of healthcare. It should be read not just by health care administrators and managers but by clinicians, researchers and all those who are interested in collaborating with health professionals in managing their own health.

In most countries health care is the major call on the budget whether it be government funding or individual (private) funds. Health care is also a major employer of workers. Many governments are challenged by the projected rapid increases in health budgets as they struggle to keep pace with the demands of ageing and chronically diseased populations. The opportunities that technology provides to increase connectivity and productivity in health systems is still only dreamed of. The potential to link communities with health providers through telehealth, hand held devices and other monitoring tools will alter the way we deliver health service in ways we are only now appreciating. Uptake of this new M (mobile) health system is slow and hampered by the incredible reticence of health practitioners (particularly doctors) to embrace change.

This book provides a fascinating insight into the plethora of new devices that are becoming available to assist connectivity across the health system be they mobile phones, implantable devices, wearable devices or more. It also stresses the opportunities for rapid acquisition of large data bases on health information and the conversion of those data into ‘intelligence.’ This will then provide practical ways of informing health professionals and patients on things such as practice guidelines, clinical data bases and intelligent health systems to guide health professionals and patients in making those important decisions about treatment options. These databases could also be used for ranking Institutions and providers of care on clinical outcomes or a range of other parameters such as value for money etc.

The opportunities for research are extraordinary – linked geospatial data bases to help in epidemiologic research and disease surveillance, genomic input to disease predictability and the power of electronic health records and real record linkage. Research needs to also be promoted on the devices and data bases themselves to ensure that the data we are now collecting is as accurate as it can be and is being interpreted appropriately. These are health interventions and should be tested as such in appropriately designed clinical trials. Issues such as privacy and the ethics around the data collection, interpretation and distribution of that data are also extremely important.

The papers are a mixture of up to date reviews of a wide range of topics and case studies demonstrating real world practical applications of these new health ‘technologies’ in a number of countries around the world from high income to emerging economies but all with the same message – these are the things we can do to improve productivity of health systems if we use these technologies and systems in an appropriate fashion.
If you are interested in any way in the future of the health system and how you might improve its productivity and connectivity, I suggest you read this book – you will find something of interest for you.

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