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Better, Not Just Longer, Life: Hacks For A Better Future You

The fact that people are living longer is a demographic reality. Alongside that has come a significant shift in how people approach their health. Rather than getting sick—then seeking medical attention—millions of people are employing technology to do what they can on their own to look after their health proactively with the goal of a better future.

But it's not just a question of longevity. Significant opportunities exist for those who recognize that people want lives that are every bit as fulfilling and vibrant as they are longer.

Not Just A Matter of Years

The growth of human longevity is undeniable. According to a study by the National Institute on Aging, most babies born in 1900 couldn't expect to live past age 50. Now, average life expectancy is roughly 80 years or so, depending on the particular country.

Medicine has naturally played a prominent role in that trend. From new pharmaceuticals to stem cell therapies, advances in medicine on a broad array of fronts have led to the increased eradication or cure of many conditions that were once undeniable death sentences—or, at the very least, better management of serious conditions (the "dying with a disease, not from" distinction.)

But it's critical not to become unduly focused on the numbers of increased longevity. For one thing, recently published studies have suggested that there may be an intrinsic limit to how long we can continue to nudge out the number of years humans can possibly live. One best guess puts that at 115 years or thereabouts.

Not Just Medicine

I used the term "guess" in the prior section for a very good reason. Although research has seemingly pinpointed an outer range of human longevity, researchers also acknowledge that new technology—in varied forms—could push that number higher, perhaps significantly.

But what seems even more concrete is the exponential growth of technology geared not merely to boosting longevity, but also enhancing the quality and vibrancy of those additional years.

Statistics bear this out. The annual smart wearable healthcare market volume is projected to grow from $2 billion in 2014 to $41 billion in 2020, a compound annual growth rate of 65 percent. One obvious beneficiary is health care costs—wearable technology could slash hospital costs by as much as 16 percent over the course of five years; remote patient monitoring and diagnostic technologies could save $200 billion over the next 25 years.

But the benefits don't end there by any means. A combination of wearable technology and mobile applications allows patients to automatically record their lifestyle habits on a daily basis. Calories consumed, exercise, heart rate, sleep patterns, blood pressure and weight can all be monitored and registered from our smartphones.

Even skin health comes into play, and not just by preventing the unsightly wrinkles that come with age. Wearables now allow sun lovers to track everything from vitamin depletion to cancer-causing UV levels.

Again, it's not just a question of lower blood pressure, glowing skin or numbers of pounds trimmed. It's also very much a quality of life issue—an extraordinary 82 percent of wearable users believe that wearable tech has enhanced their lives, from greater productivity at work to higher fitness levels. That's not just more years in one's life, but more life in one's years.

First, it's not a question of how fast new technology functions, it's a matter of what it can do. And, two, no new form of technology exists completely in the abstract. This is still very much a human world, one whose future will be shaped and improved—not supplanted—by technology.

The exponential growth of wearables is one important element of technology's impact on the field of health care—not just in helping to foster longer lives but better lives as well. Are you or your organization positioned to shape a more positive future by leveraging this or some other element of a more personal and more proactive approach to staying healthy?

About the Author:

DANIEL BURRUS is considered one of the world's leading technology forecasters and innovation experts, and is the founder and CEO of Burrus Research, a research and consulting firm that monitors global advancements in technology driven trends to help clients understand how technological, social and business forces are converging to create enormous untapped opportunities. He is the author of six books including The New York Times best seller Flash Foresight.

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