

Diagnostics leading the way for personal health

Focusing on providing personalised care and treatment plans for patients with cancer, Diaceutics is looking at disease in an entirely new way

Jullesta Sylvester,
managing director
data analytics,
Diaceutics



BY JASON WALSH

Medical diagnostics is leading to individualised treatment for patients, thanks to an explosion in computational power, but leading diagnostic business Diaceutics says governments need to re-evaluate the medical pathway.

With the best will in the world, medical treatment remains something of a blunderbuss: mass treatments undertaken with a focus on the disease at a bodily level. And yet the technology is arriving to move from mass healthcare to personal healthcare, and it starts with diagnostics.

“I think it’s a technology that is here today for a limited number of cases,” said Jullesta Sylvester, managing director of data analytics at data-driven diagnostics company Diaceutics.

Diaceutics’ focus is on diagnosing and, thus, providing individual, personalised care and treatment plans for that most feared of diseases: cancer.

“What I’m seeing is that physicians, patients and, to some extent payers – in America particularly, but also governments in Europe – are noticing that cancer can be characterised by biomarkers, and that those biomarkers are very good for targeting,” said Sylvester.

This kind of individualised treatment has long been a goal in healthcare, but, said Sylvester, it is here now. However, work remains to be done. According to Sylvester, the key is looking at disease in an entirely new way.

“It’s not just science fiction,” she said. “Healthcare payers, be they insurance companies or governments, understand that it’s real but they want to prove that it’s necessary; that it’s not just exploratory. The targeted therapies are here today, but they need to be expanded, in terms of multiple biomarkers and understanding what the cause is. If we can break it down to a molecular level, it can be treated as a bio-molecular problem, but if [as it is typically treated today] it is a whole body issue, it is a lot more complicated,” she said.

Testing is the hardest aspect

of healthcare to fund, she said. In fact, Sylvester thinks a focus on diagnostics could fundamentally change healthcare.

“It’s not taken as seriously as treatment. It’s seen as something you do when you don’t know else to do – that’s not fair. My opinion is that you can’t prescribe before you test because each patient is different,” she said.

As things stand, diagnoses can be haphazard.

“There’s a patient journey and it encompasses all of the

testing and treatments. It can be very long: years, perhaps even decades. A leukaemia patient can be diagnosed with anaemia and may be given iron, but eventually someone may test for leukaemia,” Sylvester said.

Diaceutics envisions an entirely different way of looking at the issue, moving down to the molecular level.

“My goal, and what I’d love to see for the field as a whole, is a move away from biological descriptions of cancer – breast cancer, lung cancer and so on – to molecular descriptions of it,” said Sylvester.

The technology for Diaceutics’ personalised healthcare already exists, she said. What needs to happen is for it to become commonplace – a standard part of a patient’s journey.

“The technology has matured. It has existed and become viable over the last ten years, but there is dogma to overcome. In the last five years it has changed around breast cancer, but not so much for other cancers. The activism and funding has helped. We’re now moving through, disease-by-disease, showing what is possible.”



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