

THE CARING COMMUNITY

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The Caring Community In The Present

Traditionally, the caring community has three main constituents – the old, the young, and the vulnerable.

An absence of care for these constituents is seen as a ‘public bad’, which provides the rationale for intervention in these areas by the public sector.

In recent years, there has been a shift towards the public sector commissioning care whilst achieving a blended approach in care delivery.

This may leave the provision of care vulnerable to market failure in the future if adequate safety nets are not put in place.

Pressure on funding may lead to a fundamental redefinition of the boundaries of care.



The Caring Community In The Future

We can extrapolate current trends to derive in the future a world of an ageing population, greater pressure on public resources, a two tier system of care, rising costs, and falling budgets.

As a future, this is not interesting because it is not sustainable (thus having a low chance of happening) and assumes no parametric shifts in provision.

A more interesting future would be one that considers what the game changers might be and how they might play out in future care provision.

The horizon of our interest (to 2030) is sufficiently far out for technology to have a major impact on care provision.

After a brief word about technology, we shall consider some futures for each of the care constituencies.



Future Technologies

There are two technologies that we wish to focus upon as having an impact upon the care community – ICT and bio-technology.

The direction of ICT is to become smaller, faster, more connected, and cheaper. This will impact most upon the way in which care is organised.

The direction of bio-tech is to lower the death rate, retard the ageing process, and to augment our natural abilities. This will impact most upon the levels of care that are seen as ‘standard’.

There is a hybrid area where ICT and bio-tech combine to develop mechanical devices that are integrated into the human body to improve physical performance.

We shall now consider how these trends may affect each care constituency.



The Old

The prospect of an ageing society is often posed as a future threat – particularly as a fiscal threat.

This only makes sense if we retain our existing paradigms of ageing, which is not a reasonable assumption. What is a more reasonable assumption is that the paradigm of ageing will change in the next twenty years.

The work of the transhumanists and the singularitarians is quite instructive in this area.

The key uncertainties are the degree to which life can be extended and the degree to which the ageing process can be retarded.

It could result in a future that could be quite favourable, and equally a future that could be quite unfavourable.



The Old

It is worth teasing out the future in the light of the two critical uncertainties.

	Life Not Extended	Life Extended
Ageing Process Retarded	The World Of “Logan’s Run”	The World Of “Lost Horizon”
Ageing Process Not Retarded	The World In Which We Live Now	The World Of “Soylent Green”

Care providers may wish to develop scenarios for these possible emergent worlds because of their potential financial impact.

If so, the scenarios ought to contain an ICT overlay to consider changes in service delivery.



The Young

Care for the young is primarily delivered through the education system and its infrastructure.

Technology has the capacity to transform education in the next twenty years in two ways – bio-tech has the capability to alter the ways in which knowledge is stored and accessed in the brain, and ICT has the potential to revolutionise the way in which education is delivered.

Once again, the work of the transhumanists and the singularitarians is quite instructive in this area.

The key uncertainties are the degree to which ICT delivers a system of distributed learning (and its organisational consequences), and the degree to which it becomes normal for mind enhancing medication to be used to boost student performance.



The Young

It is worth teasing out the future in the light of the two critical uncertainties.

	Mind Not Enhanced	Mind Enhanced
Distributed Education	The World Of “Star Wars”	The World Of “The Midwitch Cuckoos”
Centralised Education	The World In Which We Live Now	The World Of “Sheldon Cooper”

Education providers may wish to develop scenarios for these possible emergent worlds because they have major implications for the allocation of resources and capital if they were to happen.



The Vulnerable

Care for the vulnerable is primarily delivered through the healthcare system and its infrastructure.

Healthcare is currently delivered in a system where resources are severely constrained, but in which deliverables and expectations are rising. This is not sustainable and something will have to give in the next twenty years.

Technology has the capacity to bridge the gap between expectations and resources.

The key uncertainties are the degree to which ICT delivers a system of distributed healthcare (and its organisational consequences), and the degree to which rising expectations can be managed by healthcare providers.



The Vulnerable

It is worth teasing out the future in the light of the two critical uncertainties.

	Expectations Not Managed	Expectations Managed
Distributed Healthcare	The World Of “Coma”	The World Of “The Health App”
Centralised Healthcare	The World In Which We Live Now	The World Of “Doctor At Large”

Healthcare providers may wish to develop scenarios for these possible emergent worlds because they have major implications for the allocation of resources and capital if they were to happen.



Wrapping Up

One consistent feature of the caring community is that there is sufficient scope for disruptive technologies to be deployed within the timeframe that we are considering.

Simple trend analysis is not likely to be sufficient to prepare for such disruptions. An analysis using a series of alternative futures is more likely to yield a better preparedness for the future as it unfolds.

It is unclear that current resource deployment, particularly that of capital resources, adequately appreciates the scale of disruption that could occur.

If the future is radically different from the present we ought to start preparing for it as soon as possible.



Resources

It is important to scan for the emerging future. Resources that help in this include:

1. 'The Futurist' magazine (www.wfs.org).
2. 'The Positive Futurist' newsletter (www.positivefuturist.com)
3. The Singularity University (www.singularityu.org)
4. The Methuselah Foundation (www.methuselahfoundation.org)
5. Education Futures (www.educationfutures.com)

