

Digital Health

An Interview with Sophy Lu, Senior Vice President and Chief Information Officer, Northwell Health

EDITORS' NOTE *Sophy Lu is the Senior Vice President and CIO for Northwell Health. She served as an executive in healthcare and global information technology industries for 20+ years prior to joining Northwell in 2010. In 2017, she was named Vice President and Chief Applications Officer. Lu has spearheaded application strategies at Northwell, including software development and enterprise solutions delivery with integration and healthcare analytics across the organization. Throughout her time with Northwell, she has been instrumental in supporting many successful rollouts, including ICD-10, the initiation of digital transformation of Patient Engagement and Access (dPx), digitized imaging, electronic health record (EHR) optimizations for growth and expansion, and most recently, technology solutions for COVID-19 pandemic response, recovery and vaccine efforts. Lu earned a BS in chemical engineering from Bucknell University.*



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complement the human touch, research, and operations. We are focused on exceeding our consumer/patient/care-giver experiences on how, when, and where they want to engage. We want to know them and provide all these capabilities and omni-channel experiences.

We are also focused on what technology can do for our clinicians and for our team members. We are working to provide additional solutions, data insight, and automation at the right moments to help make decisions faster and easier, and to enhance efficiencies.

How are you engaging and training Northwell Health's workforce in its digital transformation efforts?

Digital transformation is not a technology transformation – it is a business transformation. It is also a journey we travel together with defined vision, goals, and objectives as a System supported by collaboration of clinical, consumer, analytics/business intelligence, digital information technology and services, and innovation agendas. Regular communication, change management, iterative agile delivery, as well as celebrating successes or failing fast and pivoting are critical with all constituents.

It is imperative that whatever we are creating and deploying, we constantly ask ourselves, “What are we trying to solve here?” “What is the value?” “Are we able to surprise or delight?” “Can it be measured?” “Who are the users and is it able to be adopted throughout the organization?”

Our focus on digital transformation was accelerated during the pandemic as we needed to make quick decisions and adapt to this unprecedented time. We were committed to responding to and learning from the pandemic, and the critically important role of technology was a strong lesson learned from the crisis.

How important is it to have metrics to measure the impact and progress of Northwell Health's digital transformation initiatives?

Metrics are absolutely important, but we also have to realize that we need to be agile and continuously evolve the metrics. We are constantly working to evolve these metrics based on Northwell Health's vision and objectives. Every team member in our organization needs to be aligned with our digital goals and guiding principles, and how this will impact their work. This is a work in progress, and we are learning

and adapting as we continue on our digital transformation journey.

As someone who has spent more than 30 years of your career in healthcare, will you discuss Northwell Health's commitment to taking a lead in addressing public health issues and do you see this as a differentiator for the organization?

I spent much of my career at for-profit companies which do a great deal of volunteering and donating to worthy causes. At this stage of my career journey, seeing the passion and commitment that Michael Dowling instills in his leadership team and the health system as a whole is truly special. It is not just checking a box or about monetary donations – the things we do are relevant to society's well-being and health, so we walk our talk, lobby for reform, spend time in our communities, and lend our resources and expertise to those in need. This is truly at the heart of what we mean when we refer to our mission of “Raising Health” which goes beyond providing care. It is about raising communities and standing up to societal ills. At Northwell Health, we believe that when we raise the health of our communities, we raise everyone.

Do you feel that there are strong opportunities for women to grow and lead in the industry?

Absolutely. It takes a can-do attitude, hard work, servant leadership, continuous learning, communications, remaining outcome-driven, connecting with people, and staying true to their personal brand. There are many opportunities for women to grow and lead in healthcare and that is visible at Northwell Health where there are exceptional, diverse, strong leaders in all areas of the organization.

When you are leading digital transformation which is an ongoing, long-term effort, are you able to enjoy the process and take moments to celebrate the wins?

It is important to take moments for celebrations throughout the journey, which can be different than traditional methods in these times with a hybrid workforce. We need to be creative and take the time to reimagine ways to get together and celebrate, and to acknowledge the work we are doing every day. We need to find ways to make sure our people know how much we value and appreciate their hard work and efforts. As I always say, our success is based on our team members and leaders together. We need to take care of our work family and support each other. ●

Will you discuss your role at Northwell Health and areas of focus?

The responsibilities of Northwell's CIO include leading the strategic direction, talent, information, security, technology, and services delivery for the health systems' digital transformation and integrated product innovation. I value strong internal and external partners, and being an international healthcare digital leader committed to reimagining experiences and raising health and outcomes for consumers, clinicians, and team members. To drive our digital agenda, we must leverage our strengths and culture of innovation to differentiate our service offerings and cultivate a competitive advantage while remaining steadfast to upholding Northwell's mission, vision, and values.

How do you make sure that technology does not take away from the human touch and personal relationship that Northwell Health is known for?

Whenever I speak to our team members about digital health, I close by saying that at the end of the day, our business and our product is caring for people. Our CEO, Michael Dowling, always reminds us that we are not a technology company – we are in the business of caring for patients, keeping people healthier and serving our communities. The role of technology is to