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Health sector gets 'big data' boost

Committee to help improve research and application of new technology

By LIU ZHIHUA
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China's healthcare industry is leveling up the use of big data technology, and a newly established organization aims to improve big data application in the health and medical sectors.

The China Smart Healthcare Industry Alliance, a non-profit organization of companies within the healthcare and IT industries under direction from several related bureaus of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, recently announced in Beijing that it had established a branch committee on the application of big data technology in the healthcare industry, aiming to promote the use of big data technology in the sector to improve healthcare services and people's quality of life.

In recent years, China's healthcare industry has attached great importance to the research and application of big data technology. The State Council issued a multi-department guideline in June 2016 to promote and regulate the use of big data in healthcare. The guideline called for cross-sector and cross-regional data resource



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Wang Xinping, director of the committee on the application of big data technology in the healthcare industry

sharing in the nation.

"Big data technology is a hot topic in the healthcare industry, but how to use big data technology to meet people's different needs for healthcare services while ensuring data accuracy and safeguarding personal privacy at the same time is a problem facing us all," said Wang Xinping, director of the newly established committee.

"The committee has gathered a group of scientific researchers, medical professionals and entrepreneurs to help improve the research and application of big data technology in the healthcare industry, through making policymaking suggestions and facilitating communication among related parties."

The committee is to promote the idea of establishing

a national e-identification health data center and using advanced technologies to meet data needs in the healthcare sector, such as in research comparing the outcomes of clinical practices, or developing the clinical decision advice system, as well as distant patient monitoring, analysis of clinical data, and clinical trial design.

It plans to establish a tracing system using data technology alongside the supply chain to ensure the authenticity and quality of agricultural produce and Chinese herbal medicines, and to promote health education programs tailored to individual and community needs, based on analysis backed by big data technology.

The committee also plans to strengthen international exchanges in health-related big data technology, especially within Belt and Road related regions.

However, Liu Qian, the founder of Pharmacube, a consultancy focusing on the healthcare sector, said although the committee and the organization behind it demonstrated the healthcare industry's efforts to make use of big data technology, who is entitled to be the owner of healthcare data remains disputed in China, and detailed regulations are needed to better protect individual privacy.

In many foreign countries, data belong to patients, and could only be collected and used after the patient gives permission, he said.



A cruise ship docks at Xiamen port in Fujian province. WANG DONGMING / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Xiamen launches more B&R cruise lines

By CHENG YU and
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in Xiamen, Fujian

Xiamen port in East China's Fujian province will open 10 more cruise routes to economies participating in the Belt and Road Initiative in the second half of this year, as part of its broader efforts to bolster ties with them.

"Xiamen port plans to open a total of 15 cruise routes related to the B&R Initiative this year, which is expected to bring about 60,000 tourists in total," said Chen Ziping, chairman of Xiamen Port Holding Group Co.

"The port will put routes to the B&R economies high on the agenda with an aim of building it into a transportation pivot helping the development of the

B&R Initiative," he added.

The move came after Xiamen port launched a cruise route passing through six nations involved in the initiative earlier this year.

The 220.6-meter-long, 30.8-meter-wide cruise liner made a loop and visited attractions in the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore, Cambodia and Vietnam.

Xiamen port, which handled more than 10 million containers over the past year, has moved up to the 14th largest container port globally for the first time.

By now, more than 50 such cruise routes have been opened at the port, accounting for over one-third of its total lines and linking 38 ports across 18 countries and regions.

In the first half of this year, it had already developed five new cruise routes to the B&R economies and has handled more than 21,000 tourists.

Chen noted that the port will also open some themed cruise routes with cultural performances and experiences to attract more people from both home and abroad.

"Fujian is home to many overseas Chinese. By launching themed routes like this, we expect to enhance cultural exchanges through the cruise trips," he added.

Lines related to the B&R economies have become hot tickets as epitomized by their popularity among tourists.

Zhang Haijun, head of cruise business at Xiamen International Cruise Home Port, said many cruise routes

passing through B&R countries and regions have been fully booked.

"An increasing number of tourists choose to take tours along the Maritime Silk Road as more people have a deeper understanding of the initiative," he said.

To back such routes, Xiamen port is set to bolster its competitiveness by leveraging latest technologies including cloud computing, wireless communication and unmanned automation.

Jobs like loading, unloading, and stockpiling containers can be completed by automated machines controlled by computers in the terminal's central control room.

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Keep to expand physical presence

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Chinese sports technology company Keep will open more brick-and-mortar fitness rooms as part of its broader effort to cash in on consumers' growing enthusiasm for sports, its CEO Wang Ning said.

The comments came after the three-year-old startup raised \$1.27 billion from cash-rich investors including Goldman Sachs and Tencent Holdings Ltd.

"Offline fitness rooms, called Keepland, are where our online users can meet each other and get help from coaches to improve their exercises," Wang said. "We will open about 10 such rooms in Beijing by the end of this year. In the future, we hope each city will have such a place."

Started as an app offering workout tutorials, Keep is working hard to branch into new services, in the hope of building an ecosystem that centers on quality sports content. "User-generated fitness content is one of our biggest advantages," Wang said. So far, Keep has around 150 million registered users.

Keep opened its first offline Keepland in Beijing to turn some of its online users into offline communities, which can help cultivate user loyalty and fuel their enthusiasm.

"We have also unveiled a smart treadmill that comes with a tailor-made operating system which can better track users' exercise data and help optimize their training programs," Wang said.

Priced at 1,999 yuan (\$290), the treadmill is designed as an item of hard-



Offline fitness rooms, called Keepland, are where our online users can meet each other and get help from coaches to improve their exercises."

Wang Ning, CEO of Keep

ware that can link consumers with other smart wearables at home. Its sales have exceeded 10,000 since its launch in March.

The Beijing-based company is also preparing to launch a virtual coaching service, by leveraging artificial intelligence technology. By combining all the exercise data from online users, as well as smart health and fitness facilities, the company said it hopes virtual coaching services can help more consumers access personalized coaching services at a relatively low cost.

Such ambitions were unveiled after the company finished its series D financing, led by Goldman Sachs. Other investors include internet heavyweight Tencent, GGV Capital and Morningside.

Zhang Kaixun, managing director of Goldman Sachs, said: "Amid the current wave of consumption upgrading,

sport has a huge potential market. By better integrating online and offline services, Keep can influence the lifestyle of young people."

The company is also exploring overseas markets, with its international versions now supporting more than 10 languages including English, German, Japanese and Spanish.

To better build its brand, Keep also held offline activities in Beijing earlier this month to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics and to encourage more young people to keep fit. During the past years, China has witnessed stunning growth in the sports industry linked to digital and online merchandise.

A report released last year by iResearch showed the total Chinese active users of online sports and fitness products had exceeded 350 million.

Chinese internet heavyweights such as Alibaba Group Holding Ltd, Tencent and Xiaomi Corp have also expanded their presence in the sector through acquisitions or partnerships.

Backed by government policies, high-tech equipment and products are being rolled out to help people stay healthy. Custom-made fitness programs are also in vogue.

"With the rapid development of new technologies, including big data and the internet of things, smart sports will enable a more personalized and smarter exercising experience," said Chen Gang, director of the Jiangsu provincial sport bureau.

Cheng Yu contributed to the story.

Alibaba eyes revamp in food sector

By HE WEI in Shanghai
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After taking the lion's share of China's e-commerce sector, Alibaba Group Holding Ltd is looking to revamp the food sector by addressing the imbalance between supply and demand.

Hema Fresh, its iconic fresh food chain that employs technologies to dispatch goods and manage inventory, plans to open stores across all first and second-tier cities in China and aims to reach at least 300 million consumers.

The goal was announced at last week's vendor conference in Shanghai, where Hema forged partnerships with over 500 merchants including agriculture produce bases, and pledged not to charge any fees as prerequisites for brands to access Hema.

Chief Executive Officer Hou Yi said the company was making more efforts in product development with merchants and targeting sales of tailor-made goods to account for half of Hema's overall sales in three years.

New Zealand-based dairy giant Fonterra Co-op Group Ltd was among the early adopters of such a model. For instance, the pair are shortening the shelf life of milk sold in stores down to less than 24 hours from the usual seven to 10 days. The milk is produced and collected each day at Fonterra's dairy hub in Hebei province, one of the two the company operates in China.

Such a tie-up is part of Hema's "Daily Fresh" program, which sees a host of fresh produce and meat removed from



Shoppers buy seafood at Hema Fresh in Guangzhou, Guangdong province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

store shelves at the end of the day and replaced with fresh products the following morning.

The model is likely to be extended to a wider variety of goods, with Hema signing direct procurement contracts with agricultural produce bases in Yunnan, Hubei and Shandong provinces.

"Under the project, consumers can buy the most comprehensive and fresh local produce at the lowest possible prices," said Wang Minzheng, head of the department of agriculture of Yunnan province.

"Eliminating middlemen can effectively trim costs and boost retail efficiency," said Gu Guojian, head of Shanghai Chain-Store & Franchise Institute. "The model is especially meaningful as China moves to increase imports and enhance circulation efficiency."

"They can totally leverage big data instead of third-party

market research firms to get more precise customer insights and estimates of market size, therefore deciding what and how much (of the goods) to keep stock of," said Shi Jialong, head of China internet equity research at Nomura Securities Co Ltd.

The move aims to meet the evolving preferences of Chinese consumers who shun preservatives in their quest for a healthier lifestyle. According to Hou, Hema's typical consumers are middle-to-upper income earners who are willing to experience new things and shop on a daily basis rather than weekly.

Unlike conventional supermarkets that introduce a wide range of products for shoppers to compare, Hema has adopted the buyer model, where professional procurers are responsible for sourcing and hand-picking the right goods to sell.

"This model is 'win-win' as it revolutionizes the producer end by using customer data to predict their preferences and can tailor manufacturing to meet their needs," said Lao Guoling, a professor at Shanghai University of Finance and Economics.

New Manufacturing is one of the five "New's" that Alibaba founder Jack Ma proposed two years ago to reshape commercial technologies.

Ele.me, Alibaba's newly acquired food delivery arm, has integrated its membership system with Alibaba's e-commerce sites to tap into at least 500 million active users who could order food as they shop via their mobile devices.

Koubei, its offline local services platform, has also branched out by offering breakfast pre-ordering services via smart phones in a number of café and bakery chains in Shanghai.