

# Is it Impactful or Just "Cool"?

## [Oliver Wyman Podcast Audio link](#)

Michelle says that within the past two years, the perception of "innovation" at OSF HealthCare has evolved from considering it as merely an intangible idea, to defining it as a physical space, to making it a primary health system goal. Regarding the latter, Michelle mentions they are working on three strategic organizational goals:

1. Strategic and targeted partnerships with innovators keeping a close eye on digital solutions, like MassChallenge, MATTER, and Plug and Play Tech Center
2. Driving internal operational excellence in areas like advanced imaging and modeling
3. Advancing various innovations such as virtual reality training

Technology that's more "cool" than "impactful" is not worth partnering with, says Michelle.

"One of the things we knew we had to get right was focus and not getting lost in the 'cool' factor. We prioritized focuses with our board to come up with an ecosystem," Michelle explains. "We want to be an innovation-friendly organization. For some of these digital startup companies, you need the infrastructure internally to *be able* to partner with them."

Michelle says because the natural health system tends to reject anything new, OSF HealthCare is especially selective when partnering, choosing companies offering real-life digital health solutions tied to their three focus areas.

For example, OSF HealthCare is expanding a partnership across its homecare division with Epharmix, a digital solution that texts patients about their medication use, and is working with SilverCloud, which offers a behavioral health access solution they've been scaling "with great success."

"A lot of our markets have difficulty accessing mental health services. We directly connected this application with our behavioral health navigators, so an individual can complete an online assessment which our navigators monitor behind-the-scenes should patients need additional help. If not, there's a series of online prescriptive models they go through," she says.

## Lessons for Health Systems

Michelle says you need dedicated resources and focus to thrive in a healthcare technology partnership.

"If you're really serious about this, you can't put a startup company through your traditional operating model and contracting process. It's not going to work. There's a lot of noise healthcare systems get inundated with. All of us could get 50 emails a day saying: 'I've got this new solution that's going to change the world!' she says.

"Having a dedicated team who canvasses what's really out there by front-end coaching and mentoring with some of these companies through these channels is really important," she says.

"You have to construct a pilot that makes sense. You can't pilot forever, and you can't pilot everything. You have to measure success and understand that sometime failure's okay."

Some of the pilots at OSF HealthCare, says Michelle, were great ideas, but were great ideas applied to the wrong problem.

"You also have to be comfortable giving startups real, honest feedback so they understand the future state in terms of how to develop the product," she adds.

## How do you Measure Innovation Outcomes?

One step towards evaluating how successful an organization's innovation really is has to do with pinpointing what a startup's focus is, Michelle says. Another is to be transparent with an investment.

"Not everything we're doing is a moonshot or a massive transformative effort. We track dollars we're spending, results from core and breakthrough projects, and are transparent with timelines. We talk about how we're either going to course correct or we won't do it at all. This isn't something traditional healthcare is comfortable with," she says.

But the healthcare's future is filled with promise as the pendulum swings in a different direction.

"Healthcare is a complex, highly regulated industry offering a product most people only think of when they become sick, with incumbent players who have a lot to lose. There is now an imperative that makes 'innovation' for health systems less of a buzzword and more of a lifeline for the future."

*For more information, check out the [Oliver Wyman Health Podcast page](#), featuring executive conversations on the business of transforming healthcare*