

By S.C. Stuart

# Is AI the New MD?

One (Healthy) Reporter Scopes Out the Newest in High-tech Luxury Health Care

**Founded by former employees of Google,** a new concierge medical platform called Forward amps up the typical annual visit with artificial intelligence and tech gadgetry, positioning itself as the new wave in primary care. *Mosaic* pays a visit to Forward's Los Angeles facility, to examine what's new in the exam room.

I used to live in NYC, where I had a fancy executive job (with accompanying salary) and booked my annual physical at a high-end medical practice in SoHo. It wasn't covered by insurance, but I didn't care; they gave a great service and I was happy to pay to ensure the stresses of international travel and corporate life weren't killing me (yet).

Cut to 2013. I moved to Los Angeles, hit the ground running and made do with what my regular insurance provider furnished. But recently I've felt nostalgic for my old top-tier doctor's visits, so I decided to check out Forward, a new AI-powered med-tech startup.

Founded in January 2016 by former Google exec Adrian Aoun, Forward has some serious backers, including Eric Schmidt, former executive chairman of Google, and Marc Benioff, founder, chairman and CEO of software company Salesforce.





## FEATURE

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“As consumers, we demand the latest technology in everything because it improves the quality of our lives. Yet when it comes to our health-care—arguably the most important thing of all—we accept outdated technology and tools,” Aoun points out.

Forward is also looking outside the box when it comes to locale. It doesn’t want to be near other clinics or major hospitals but right at the center of all things lifestyle. In San Francisco, you’ll find one amid high-end retail and eateries on Sutter Street. Here in Los Angeles, it’s in the upscale mall at Westfield Century City (upstairs from the Tesla EV charging stations and near Amazon’s new concept store). A third location, opening August 2018, is in Newport Beach, again within a plush mall.

From the outside, Forward resembles a Nordic-style spa lobby, all bleached woods and soothing cerulean blue lighting. The big clue that this is something more complex are the flat

screens shimmering with real-time data feeds.

“I started Forward to put the most advanced technology in the hands of doctors to ultimately improve the outcomes of those under their care,” says Aoun.

As I was just doing due diligence, I didn’t have a full consultation, but attentive staff walked me through the detailed process. Firstly, I stood on a 3-D body scanner, looking straight ahead at the screen, and slid my finger into a recessed sensor. This full body scan and vital signs data would then serve as my baseline health analysis and be shared, in real time, with a clinical advisor waiting in one of the exam rooms.

As each metric was recorded, my Forward mobile app, which I’d already downloaded onto my phone, would then be populated with all the information gathered so far, including a 12-minute, on-site full metabolic panel. Other data sources can include genomic, prior test results and medications. I liked the concept that I’d have all

**Vital signs:**  
A 3-D body scanner with real-time results

*“By building the first doctor’s office that learns, we are putting key data and insights in the hands of our doctors.”*

this data in one place and, best of all, that I could then track changes over time. Moving through the doors at the back, I saw several exam rooms, all softly lit, with quiet furnishings. No scratchy, unflattering open-at-the-back gowns or harshly lighted examination tables, and doctors at Forward don’t wear scrubs. It’s all very civilized, as you’d expect for a premium service (prices are \$149 a month for unlimited-use membership). I slipped into a zero-g recliner (designed by Forward’s team), which moved effortlessly into flatbed mode.

My guide next explained that my personal clinician would walk me through my results on the flat screen ahead, developing an action plan to improve any current or future health concerns. The screen had voice recognition so our conversation could be recorded, using natural language processing for interpretation. Usually my doctor has half an eye on me but then turns away to type in notes, but here I felt I, as the patient, was the focus.

Next up: the wearables. This is a key differentiator for Forward’s service. Incorporating real-time

data feeds, captured from sensors on the body, enables a much higher level of service.

I was keen on learning more about the Oura Ring sleep-management device and the Nokia Steel and Misfit Ray activity devices. Hopefully I will never be at risk of heart attacks and have to wear a Kardia EKG, but it’s great it’s another option in the Forward platform.

“By building the first doctor’s office that learns, we are putting key data and insights in the hands of our doctors,” explains Aoun, “enabling them to make highly informed decisions. We are excited to accelerate the learning in healthcare.”

I’m still considering my future health options, but Forward is an impressive set-up—one that illustrates a new healthcare paradigm, shifting from one-size-fits-all medicine to truly “me-based” AI-powered care. So, if you’re looking for tailored service, serene surroundings and high-tech gadgetry that utilizes the magic of AI the next time you go for a physical, press play with Forward. ■



## Real Genius

Here Are Three More AI Developments Shaking up Medicine

### WoeBot

An AI bot that is trained in conversational therapeutic patterns, designed to alleviate anxiety in vulnerable people, developed by Dr. Alison Darcy, an adjunct faculty member at Stanford’s Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences. [woeboot.io](http://woeboot.io)

### IVEY

A 3-D-printed robot, 13.5 inches tall, named for the IV procedures it helps young patients endure, has been adapted for Children’s Hospital Los Angeles by Maja Mataric, PhD, head of USC’s Robotics and Autonomous Systems Center. It helps tiny patients communicate pain and stress levels and delivers coping tools [chla.org](http://chla.org) for more info.

### EXO-UL8: Exoskeleton

Wearable robotic system designed for patients recovering from a stroke. The system is the brainchild of Dr. Jacob Rosen, director of the Bionics Lab at UCLA. [bionics.seas.ucla.edu](http://bionics.seas.ucla.edu).