

The digital impact of COVID ? are you a bystander in a fast-paced digital world?

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In February 2019 HEE published the Topol review [7]. Dr Eric Topol brought together a remarkable cross-disciplinary team of experts, including clinicians, educators, engineers, ethicists and economists, alongside leaders in digital healthcare development.

This independent review was presented to the Secretary of State, providing key recommendations for the citizen and the patient, for healthcare professionals and for the system to deliver the changes needed to develop a genuinely effective, digital-ready, 21st century healthcare workforce. All these recommendations have been wrapped up into the Digital Readiness [8] or Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) [9] programmes within HEE.

When the report was published, no one could have foreseen the world-changing impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic on all elements of life, not least that of healthcare. COVID has resulted in a real culture hack and acceleration to the digital agenda and how the public and NHS have had to embrace the technologies available.

Fifteen months ago, this would not have been possible. The speed of change brought about by the pandemic has highlighted the need for digital maturity in health and care organisations and for them to better understanding the power of digital to transform their services. To address this HEE are working with NHS Providers to deliver digital development for Trust boards [10]. Where do you want to be looking forward and how can we help you to get there?

Prior to the pandemic, around 80% of GP appointments took place face-to-face but, forced by necessity, uptake of online and phone consultation has happened at pace with remote appointments becoming accepted as part of the 'new normal'. However, despite the undeniable progress that has been made, there remains some inevitable retro fitting required to processes that were implemented in haste to ensure they are fit for current and future purpose. Patient choice and the potential to increase health inequalities must be considered.

The COVID-19 outbreak has also seen some great examples of joined-up working across the NHS, and in many cases local government and social care, but has also exposed once again the deep-rooted differences between the NHS and social care. HEE's Digital Readiness Programme is seeking to address this by taking elements (services, models, offerings) from the other delivery workstreams and apply them, often in a tailored way, for the social care workforce. For example, by adapting Topol Fellowships for the social care workforce and creating Digital Academy-like content for social care, and scoping career pathways for social care clinical informaticians.

With all this in mind, we welcome the publication of the Health and Care Bill White Paper <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-health-and-social-care-for-all> [11], published today by the Department of Health and Social Care. The proposed legislation is aimed at improving how different parts of the health and care system collaborate and cooperate for the benefits of local people. HEE notes the proposal to remove LETBs and welcomes the objective of reducing bureaucracy and encouraging more flexible local working arrangements, to allow different parts of the country to focus on their specific priorities and ensure that expert skills and experience is targeted to meet local need, in partnership with NHSE/I and ICSs.

We also look forward to working with NHS England and NHS Improvement and other partners to help DHSC clarify responsibilities for workforce planning and supply. This will allow HEE to concentrate on supporting the health and care system, convening a high-quality education and training system, and ensuring learners are looked after whether in the current or future workforce.

Finally, to come back to the Topol Review. Marking the anniversary of its publication we recently gathered members of the Review's Board and the Clinical Fellows who played a role in delivering this ground-breaking report and filmed two fascinating roundtable sessions discussing progress on the key findings two years on. Please do look out for these films which will be made available on our website towards the end of February.

Digital first is an opportunity for some organisations and a threat to others across the health and care system ? will you be a walker, jogger, or bystander as we look ahead to the COVID recovery phase?

Best Wishes

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