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The Role of Digital Healthcare during these Challenging Times

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The COVID-19 pandemic highlights the need for digital transformation, particularly for UK healthcare where tech adoption in many cases has been slow until now. As healthcare providers adapt to a new way of working, it seems likely this pandemic could become a catalyst for digital transformation in the UK NHS.

The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented global health and economic challenge. The impact of this novel coronavirus has felt shocking, yet experts have warned for years that a global pandemic is inevitable and that a crisis such as this should be considered a question of not 'if', but 'when'.

As we look to the future it is not just how we specifically tackle COVID-19 that's important but also, more broadly, what our response is to this pandemic and how we can be better equipped to respond next time. Digital technology adoption and infrastructure is a key factor and the requirement to fast-track digital transformation is now being witnessed across many different sectors, including the UK NHS.

A catalyst for NHS digital transformation

In the UK, there have been NHS digitisation plans in place for many years, but adoption has often been slow. For example, back in 2016 the NHS Five Year Forward View set a deadline of 2020 for all secondary care providers to be 'paperless'. This deadline was not met, and the current NHS Long-Term Plan has set

a target for all secondary care providers to become fully digitised by 2024. Now, suddenly, certain parts of this digital transformation are being accelerated directly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

With the introduction of social distancing and self-isolation measures, aiming to slow the spread of the disease, there is increasing demand for the NHS to support remote working and teleconsultations. GP services and outpatient clinics have had no choice but to provide video consultations as an alternative to face-to-face appointments with patients. Online and telehealth services such as NHS 111 are seeing a surge in demand and are also receiving additional investment to help with this growth. It seems inevitable that these changes will help accelerate some of the NHS Long-Term Plan targets such as the 'right' for all patients to have access to digital primary care services by 2024 or the aim to reduce face-to-face outpatient visits by up to a third.

A recent survey of Digital Health News readers revealed over 80% believe the outbreak of Covid-19 will speed up the adoption of digital tools across the NHS. We can't predict the future, but the COVID-19 pandemic may mark the start of a paradigm shift in NHS healthcare delivery underpinned by digital transformation. Technology is certainly playing a key role in helping to ease the burden on the NHS frontline and will be essential for a more efficient and effective response to future epidemics.

New digital resources for COVID-19

Technology suppliers to the NHS, such as electronic patient record systems, are now updating their solutions to help customers screen and monitor COVID-19 patients. These solutions require good quality clinical documentation which can often be difficult to achieve in practice but can be improved by adding AI-powered speech recognition. Speech recognition solutions help all members of the care team to capture and document patient data quickly and more accurately, saving them time, and improving the quality of the care record and speeding up healthcare data availability. Here at Nuance, we are working closely with our customers to support growing patient volumes, telehealth visits, and remote-work initiatives in response to the pandemic. For more information please read our latest press release or to learn more about our free COVID-19 Content Pack for Nuance Dragon® Medical users in the UK, please click here.

Tags: Digitisation of the NHS, Electronic patient records (EPR)

More Information

COVID-19 Auto-text Templates

Free content pack specific to COVID-19 available for Nuance Dragon® Medical users in the UK

Learn more

About Dr. Simon Wallace

Dr. Simon Wallace is the Chief Clinical Information Officer (CCIO) of Nuance's Healthcare division in the UK and Ireland. Simon has worked as a GP, hospital and public health doctor in Brighton and London. His interest in health informatics began in the 90s when he spent a year at the King's Fund investigating the impact of the internet on shared decision making between patients and their healthcare professional. For the past 15 years, he has worked for a range of organisations including Bupa, Dr Foster, Cerner Corporation and GSK across a range of technologies which include electronic patient records, telemedicine, mobile health and lifestyle devices. Simon has a keen interest in the voluntary sector, recently completing a 7 year term as a Trustee for Fitzrovia Youth in Action, a children and young people's charity based in London.

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