HOW TO ENABLE A NEW DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM TO SUPPORT REMOTE HEALTH TRANSFORMATION ACROSS THE NHS

The global pandemic's impact is accelerating the evolution of remote health transformation across the NHS and other healthcare organisations at an unprecedented pace. We're seeing the move to more treatments being managed outside of the hospital; from GP referrals, eConsultations - to remote diagnostics and monitoring being launched in weeks, rather than years. It's the biggest NHS transformation in decades.

In the UK, we've recently seen the vast majority of the 1.2m face-to-face consultations that were previously carried out daily, now being performed remotely. This tremendous shift is recognised by the Royal College of General Practitioners revealing that, 71% of routine consultations were remote in the four weeks leading up to April 12th, compared to 25% in the same period last year.

Driving these wide-scale changes across remote health is a digital ecosystem. In his eBook we'll explore the key technology challenges and opportunities for ensuring this ecosystem enables remote health to reach its potential, so NHS staff can do more of what really counts: delivering optimal patient care.

How remote health is delivering a bright future

All remote health activities across the NHS are being underpinned by an increasingly complex, ever-evolving digital ecosystem of collaboration and communication technologies to enable video and text chat consultation – as well as a range of health monitoring tools.

In fact, many of these tools including; electronic patient records, online triage, electronic prescribing, messaging and video consultations were already available before the pandemic but weren't being employed cohesively, or at any meaningful scale.

Where these technologies can't fill the gaps, there's face to face interaction - and going forward, these virtual or in person options will be key to maintaining patient choice. One thing's for sure, patients will always require the human touch from clinicians and they must be able to perform services from any location as efficiently and responsively as possible. However, with the expansion of remote pathways, care must also be delivered to a consistent standard wherever the postcode, and to those with disabilities and those that struggle to understand how to seek care too.

Look ahead and we'll see machine learning algorithms increasingly used to assess patient symptoms or patient behaviour, their language and expressions too. Collaboration technologies will evolve so patient engagement flows more naturally, with fewer interruptions and so clinicians can pick up on human nuances. Enhanced patient portals will also provide easier interactions with Trusts and enable the self-management of the whole patient experience. We'll also see more interactive innovations to improve overall health outcomes that include; eSurveys, eEvents and eCare plans too

Key challenges

While all this sounds great, the NHS is on a voyage of discovery, it's operating in uncharted territory and with no real reference points to consider. With the scale of agenda being so huge, efforts must be focused on the most urgent areas - to further enable and evolve the digital ecosystem that drives remote health transformation. There are many points along the journey; from the initial appointment - to remote monitoring operating with other tech to prioritise further treatment, so there's a need to accelerate the prioritisation and management of all these new data points and feed them into systems.

However, many Trusts still suffer from splintered, siloed functions and systems which prevent a common, collaborative way of working and data sharing. Therefore, more standardised methods are required to connect poor system and platform interoperability across these environments.

External pressures present a continual challenge too; COVID-19 has accelerated innovation on one hand, but is also creating time and opportunity constraints to delivering these innovations on the other. Ultimately, all Trusts must work towards becoming more digitally mature, well-connected organisations, as only then can they provide proper foundations for further transformations.

Key enabling solutions

There are a number of technologies that will help overcome these barriers and enable the interconnected digital ecosystem required to drive remote health transformation. Clearly, joint collaboration platforms and other evolving communications tools are critical here, as are e-patient record technologies that remove the constraints of paper-based systems. Cognitive technologies, such as natural language processing and sentiment analysis, will help improve patient and clinician engagement experience.

However, the key unifying change agent is intelligent automation that runs a digital workforce that interoperates with all systems across disjointed operating environments. Intelligent automation

is proving the best way to swiftly and accurately perform joined up, data-driven, end-to-end, process-based activities, so they're delivered much faster, smarter and more efficiently – without limits.

A compelling option being adopted by over 50 NHS Trusts is Blue Prism's cloud-based intelligent automation platform that provides AI-powered digital workers into the NHS resource pool to automate a wide range of activities at unprecedented speed - across multiple functions. In fact, there's a growing community of healthcare organisations who are sharing their tried and tested automations on Blue Prism Cloud using the NHS Digital Exchange (DX) so that NHS teams can further accelerate the deployment of new automations and better support remote health activities

Intelligent automation in action

There are a number of key potential outcomes that are resulting from the collaborative use of intelligent automaton that drives remote health transformation. Results include far greater operational agility – where supporting technologies and information flow better and faster to deliver accelerated booking times and more effective patient insights to support remote working clinicians.

Crucially, reducing the need for face-to-face appointments is not only saving administrative time and reducing patient waiting periods, it's improving the quality of care too. For example, clinicians can now be alerted in real-time of any patient issues, therapeutic monitoring apps used by patients enable the appropriate course of action to be taken much quicker than before. This earlier detection and intervention will prevent more costly treatments down the line.

There are also a number of outcomes already being achieved across the NHS with the capabilities of Blue Prism intelligent automaton. The North East London Commissioning Support Unit (NEL CSU) has significantly reduced the time taken for patient re-bookings, staff are happier as they're being liberated from operational tasks so they've more time to deliver front-line care. In the central back office too NEL has applied digital workers within the HR department and successfully reduced the recruitment process for new hires by one week.

The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust is also seeing a major acceleration of eReferral processing that's saving human resources and time. Private patient billing is also being automated so it's performed much faster with zero errors. This in turn, enables the team to focus on maintaining positive relationship when chasing debt – spending more time on speaking with people in a sympathetic, empathetic way.

University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Trust is helping patients book follow up appointments so everyone receives a wealth of tailored communications, confirming each step of their treatment. With 600,000 yearly bookings, there's no way staff could proactively manually manage that level of personalised communication. For medical staff, they see countless automation opportunities for removing the daily burden of updating patient record systems so that they can dedicate their time to providing front-line care.

.Key success factors

For those Trusts and other NHS organisations considering the adoption of intelligent automation, there are some key learnings that should be considered. A single intelligent automation platform is preferable for ease of management. Not only should it fit the requirements of a Trust's operational environment, but it should be quick to deploy and easy to use too.

To be successful, an automation programme needs to be strategically aligned to wider goals - such as transforming remote care. Gaining executive sponsorship from a CIO, CFO, CCIO, COO or Director of Transformation for the automation programme right at the start will really help to sustain wider scale of adoption further down the line.

To sustain further demand also means always communicating the benefits across NHS Trusts and other healthcare organisations, engaging with the wider teams, breaking down silos and educating staff about intelligent automation's potential so they're encouraged to seek process opportunities. It's also important to work collaboratively, to reach out to relevant communities to gain and share knowledge. Ultimately, intelligent automation is a journey – not just a quick fix, use it collaboratively and it will help enable the digital ecosystem that underpins remote health transformation and put you on track to transform patient care.

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Blue Prism is the global leader in intelligent automation for the enterprise, transforming the way work is done. At Blue Prism, we have users in over 170 countries in more than 1,800 businesses, including Fortune 500 and public sector organizations, that are creating value with new ways of working, unlocking efficiencies, and returning millions of hours of work back into their businesses. Our intelligent digital workforce is smart, secure, scalable and accessible to all; freeing up humans to re-imagine work.

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