



Transformational Government

Enabled by technology

Health

Delivery experts working in Department of Health have worked up, in their own words, some hypothetical examples that give a glimpse of what may be possible in the future. These scenarios are not policy statements of what will happen: they are illustrations of what might be possible in a simple pragmatic way when the principles of the strategy are delivered. These illustrations simply apply existing technologies used widely in the private sector to public sector delivery models, rather than trying to stretch the technology too far.

The National Programme for IT, which is being delivered by the new Department of Health agency NHS Connecting for Health, is bringing modern computer systems into the NHS to improve patient care and services. Over the next ten years, the National Programme for IT will connect over 30,000 GPs in England to almost 300 hospitals and give patients access to their personal health and care information, transforming the way the NHS works.

The new systems will bring huge benefits for patients, staff and the NHS itself. The two scenarios below show how the NHS will look in the future from the point of view of a patient and a GP.

Vision for future NHS – patient

Jayne Jones has a hip problem and goes to her GP because it seems to be getting worse.

He sends her for an x-ray at her local hospital where a new system means the resulting images of her hip are stored on computer rather than on film. The hospital sends the report electronically to her GP for him to review, so that he does not have to wait for information to arrive in the post.

At a second appointment with her GP Jayne, 70, agrees to try a new medication. She then goes to stay with her daughter 50 miles away. She's happy to make the trip, safe in the knowledge that, should she fall ill, local doctors will have all the information they need about her health because she now has an electronic NHS Care Record which can be available at the point of need anywhere in the country.

This medical record will include details of the latest medication she has been prescribed should she need a repeat prescription.

Back home, Jayne returns to her GP as her hip does not seem to be improving. They decide she needs to see a consultant. Sitting in her GP's surgery, Jayne is able to choose an appointment at her local hospital at a date and time to suit her. She books the appointment there and then using the electronic link-up between the surgery and the local hospital.

At her appointment in the hospital's outpatients' clinic, the consultant she sees has accurate, up-to-date information about her care at his fingertips as a result of the new electronic system. He is able

to check her medical notes using secure access to computer records and make the necessary arrangements for an operation, which will hopefully improve her condition.

Vision for the future – GP

NHS Connecting for Health will mean that information will be more readily available to GPs and their colleagues in primary care.

NHS Connecting for Health will help transform the way the NHS works by bringing in new services including Choose and Book (electronic appointment booking), an NHS Care Records Service (NHS CRS), a system for the Electronic Transmission of Prescriptions (ETP) and a fast, reliable underlying IT infrastructure.

The National Programme for IT will also help end the frustration of working with incomplete information. At present, when a patient comes out of hospital, GPs have to wait for complete information to come through and rely on the patient's account and a brief summary when they come back to the surgery. With the new systems, GPs will have information available when they need it, saving time and reducing bureaucracy for GPs and practice staff.

Sometimes GP appointments at the moment are taken up with patients who want to find out why they have not yet heard from the hospital to which they have been referred. Choose and Book will help solve that problem by streamlining the booking of hospital appointments for patients. Patients will be able to sit down with their GP or receptionist and, through the booking service, choose an appointment that suits them. A patient will also know how to easily and quickly change the appointment if a problem arises.

The NHS CRS will give GPs a summary view of a patient's health history when and where this information is needed – at the point of care. This will improve transfers and handovers of care including situations when patients move between GP practices, when they require out of hours care

or when they are admitted to Accident and Emergency. The ability to request tests and access test results electronically will be another improvement for GPs. The National Programme will help reduce risk, by ensuring that information is available where it needs to be to improve the patient's care.

When a new patient joins a GP practice, it can take some time for their paper record to arrive from the previous surgery. Having records transferred electronically between practices will save large amounts of time as well as improving patient safety by ensuring the record is available when needed.

GPs will also benefit from new tools to support clinical decision-making. National guidelines and recommendations from organisations like the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) will be more accessible. Online guidance and procedures for referring patients and ordering clinical investigations will also be available, along with up to date, accurate and accredited protocols of care, procedures and clinical guidance.