

The digital agenda



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What's the problem?

While industry and society has embraced digital technology, the NHS could make better use of information and technology to improve access care for patients. By any measure, digital and data innovation offer significant opportunities to transform and improve health and social care systems. However, in reality, online consultations are in the minority, patient records remain largely paper based and IT systems that should be seamlessly integrated are often not. A national focus on tackling digital transformation has been addressed in the [Five Year Forward View](#) and [Paperless 2020](#) policy documents. As an institution, the NHS is uniquely positioned to lead digital and data transformation across its whole ecosystem. The potential to positively impact population health, will not only benefit patients and the NHS, but will have untold economic and social advantages.

What can the Government do?

Digital transformation and the use of big data is potentially life-saving. It should be viewed as a long-term investment that requires continual investment, reiterations and updates. There has been a significant national investment of £ 4.2bn to bring the NHS into the digital age. National strategy has focused on encouraging and fostering digital transformation at a local level. Previous failed national efforts at digital transformation have demonstrated that local engagement is key. However, it is important to realise that for the system to work as a whole; national standards should be developed to make sure that they are interoperable. Local innovation and development must be encouraged, but this should also be balanced with an overview of developments nationally. It is important that we move forward as a whole system and avoid certain areas falling behind.

It is vital that patients are at the centre of any health system transformation and this is especially true with digital transformation. Patients must trust the system they are part of. Data-sharing in health and social care has always been topical and somewhat controversial. It is important that patients are made aware of the benefits that sharing their information could have on their health. It is also important that any processes with regards to data-sharing are transparent with a strong governance processes in place as recommended in The Caldicott Review. Patient data belongs to patients and it is important that any decisions made in the digital sphere reflect this principle.

What can Colleges and the medical profession do?

Digital transformation will only work if the healthcare workforce supports it. Improving patient care is the duty of all healthcare professionals and if done correctly, digital transformation will improve patient care.

Transformation and innovation will be most effective when clinicians are engaged in its development, procurement and use. The Academy and Colleges have collaborated to publish the [Clinical Requirements 2020](#) document. This document is the first of its kind with regards to digital transformation. It sets out, in plain English, a set of requirements and expectations from the clinical community about what they expect digital transformation to look like when delivering patient care.

The Academy will seek to build on this work by exploring issues around the growing use of Artificial Intelligence in healthcare and the ethical issues that accompany the use of AI.

It is vital that those who work and understand the health service lead and contribute to digital transformation at strategic and operational levels, both nationally and locally.