

## Healthcare Hub Note

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### Digital health: Extending the boundaries of care

Simmons & Simmons' 10th Healthcare Hub dinner on 8 November 2017 discussed digital health and in particular extending the boundaries of care via digital technology. The discussion followed introductory remarks by Dr Harpreet Sood, Associate Chief Clinical Information Officer of NHS England, and Tony Graff, CEO, and Dr Bayju Thakar, co-founder, of Doctor Care Anywhere.

Insights arising from the discussion included:

#### Is digital health disruptive enough?

Digital health is driving innovation in healthcare provision, but query whether digital health technology has had the level of impact to be considered truly disruptive to the healthcare system at this point. There is clearly an appetite for harnessing the power of digital technology and its potential benefits, which is driving the increasing digitalisation of the healthcare sector. This evolution has, however, been incremental so far and it is hard to argue that the operation and economics of healthcare services have changed sufficiently yet, at least in the UK, to label this technology as disruptive to the system as a whole. Empowering clinicians and patients to use and accept digital healthcare appears to be a key challenge, alongside navigating the commercial, legal and regulatory barriers to market entry. Proving the economic viability of new technologies is also crucial and a hurdle which needs to be overcome in order to drive wider uptake of digital technology within both the public and independent/private sectors. This will require more comprehensive testing, data and results from larger patient populations (which may take time) in order to provide compelling, measurable evidence that digital health technologies can improve the service offering provided to patients.

#### What are the prospects for an "Internet hospital"?

Digital health is changing attitudes to and the way that we view healthcare services, away from one-to-one transactional type interactions and towards a more holistic service offering. There is potential for an "internet hospital" type service where digital technology moves many existing patient interactions to an internet-based platform so patients can receive consultations or take tests remotely via the internet, and data can be stored securely via the cloud. In addition, engagement with individuals is taking place before they are patients requiring formal medical advice, through wellness type apps, informal health assessments or digital provision of more basic health information. Looking at healthcare services in a more flexible way, and as more than a transactional service, will also help target and increase the prevention of illness and bad health. This is key to driving efficiencies and more effective allocation of resources within the healthcare system. Ultimately, digital health has the potential to improve services across the patient journey.

#### What is the role of GPs and other primary care physicians in an increasingly digital landscape?

Given the increase of digital diagnostic tools and mobile consultations, some participants queried whether the existing service offering of the general practitioner (GP) needs to change. New digital health platforms may disrupt the traditional gateway into the UK and other healthcare systems via an initial consultation with your GP. The combination of digitally extracted diagnostics with a patient's digital healthcare record could provide a digital gateway which replaces this initial consultation, and facilitates the next stage of the patient pathway, whether that be a face-to-face meeting, a referral to a consultant or further tests. The impact that GPs have across the patient journey is changing with increasing digitalisation of healthcare, and there is a need to assess how best to allocate and use the skills and services that GPs offer in light of that change. There was nevertheless a recognition of the vital role that GPs play, including in providing services and skills with less measurable or quantifiable outcomes, such as the one-to-one personal relationships formed with patients and the softer aspects of treatment (putting the "care" in the healthcare system).

## Is digital health the only answer?

The global digital health market is one of the most innovative and fast-moving areas across the technology, healthcare and life sciences sectors. New technology is set to transform the healthcare sector both in terms of drug discovery and development, delivering cost savings and efficiencies and allowing patients to take increasing ownership of their own health. But, expectations about the impact and uptake of digital health need to be managed, especially in the public sector. Providing and communicating evidence of the benefits from this technology, both from a service provision and financial perspective, will need to drive change in the healthcare industry and wider uptake of digital technologies. This may take more time for some aspects of digital health. It is likely to require substantial investment from the public and independent/private sectors, and the development of incentives for the digital health industry. While certain digital products and services may replace aspects of the current service offering, this will not always be the case, and digital healthcare needs to innovate in a way that works with, and improves, existing systems and services.

Simmons & Simmons has created a microsite which highlights some of the key considerations that will need to be borne in mind when entering into the digital health sphere including, regulatory requirements, intellectual property protection, use of big data, collaborative development and commercialisation opportunities, raising investment and commercial risk. The microsite can be accessed on our award-winning free knowhow portal [elexica here](#).

If you are not already registered on [elexica](#), you can access the content following completion of a short registration form [here](#).

If you would like more information about the [Healthcare Hub](#) network, please contact Jocelyn Ormond or Charles Mayo.



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