Rt Hon Wes Streeting
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care.

Friday 27 June 2025

Single Patient Record

Dear Secretary of State

The elected leaders of Digital Health Networks, an independent community of best practice and collaboration representing local NHS digital leaders, sent you a letter on the 11 January 2024, whilst you were in your shadow role. In that letter we set out our five pragmatic digital priorities that we hoped would form the core of your digital agenda as you seek to transform the health and care service.

We are disappointed that NHS digital central policy seems to be seeking the elusive silver bullet, rather than building a stable, sound, robust digital service that will then enable wide scale service transformation.

The five digital priorities we highlighted in January 2024 called for sustained focus on the fundamental basics of IT infrastructure, developing a digitally skilled workforce and providing much greater stability and need for predictability on funding and policy initiatives. These are still necessary and other, more innovative and dare we say shiny projects will flounder if these priorities are not addressed.

Our five priorities remain as we articulated in January 2024 and it would be disappointing if extra funding is funnelled into the idea of a Single Patient Record, which will have limited impact for the majority of care processes, instead of addressing these priorities that will begin to enable change at a massive scale.

1. **Financial Predictability, Governance and Trust:**
The first priority is for greater predictability of national funding and policy initiatives and a reduction in chronic short-termism on digital, which severely hampers the ability of local NHS IT leaders to plan and deliver improvements to the NHS through digital. EPR Funding is a significant concern.

2. **Consistent Focus on Getting the Basics Right (Smart Foundations)**:
The second priority is for a consistent focus on 'getting the basics right', ensuring staff have access to the reliable laptops, networks and Wi-Fi needed to do their job in a modern NHS. This comes under the 'Smart Foundations' of NHS England's 'What Good Looks Like'. Failure to invest in digital basics is failing clinicians delivering care.

3. **Workforce Development and reducing Digital Burnout through improved User Experience:**
The third priority focuses on workforce-related issues, such as the Digital Data and Technology (DDaT) workforce plan, training, and digital literacy amongst staff, which is a major concern. It also emphasises the need to ensure the onboarding process for new staff, and HR systems, are up to date and user friendly.

4. **Data, Shared Records and Interoperability:**
The fourth priority calls for greater focus on data quality, data asset management, data sharing, standards and data infrastructure. Data driven insights (FDP) and leveraging AI capability require good data asset management and support to deliver Trusted Research Environments.

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5. **Greater sharing of Skills, Knowledge and Experience:**
The fifth priority is for much greater sharing of skills, knowledge and experience on digital across the NHS.

The detailed description of the five priorities is attached.

Significantly, none of the priorities are for a particular technology or platform but are instead about allowing effective planning, governance, infrastructure, workforce development, focusing on user experience, data quality and reinforcing mechanisms to enable sharing of skills and knowledge. All of these require more measured policy making and sustained focus.

Our key message is that the NHS fortunately has many highly able and experienced local digital leaders. They should be trusted and empowered to develop and implement locally relevant and appropriate strategies.

If adopted by national policy leaders, working in partnership with local NHS digital leaders, the recommended measures would unquestionably better enable the NHS to adopt digital technologies to help improve patient care.

As a group we offer you our support and would be very happy to discuss with you and your team how any of the five priorities could be effectively implemented.

The priorities were identified at an in-person meeting of the elected advisory panels of the CCIO, CIO and CNIO networks held in London on 8 December 2023.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Jones, Chair, Chief Information Officer Network

Dermot O'Riordan, Chair, Chief Clinical Information Officer Network

Hayley Grafton, Chair, Chief Nursing Information Officer Network