



## LETTERS

## DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

# Information technology in the NHS: aspirations and reality

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The issue of 25 March 2017 captured many of the problems with digital healthcare that must be tackled if the NHS is to go paperless by 2020.

The paper by Sinsky and colleagues highlighted by Loder in Editor's Choice confirms many concerns that the current use of digital technology in healthcare usually means less time spent on the core activity of treating patients.<sup>1,2</sup> This is seen, for example, with report writing packages that take more time to complete than the procedure and with electronic patient records that need hours of training and support yet still present hurdles in writing a prescription or discharging a patient efficiently. In addition, many activities previously done by administrative staff have gravitated to a highly paid medical workforce.

I support digitalisation of healthcare systems and welcome the opportunity to improve the delivery of care, training, audit, and appraisal as outlined by Moberly.<sup>3</sup> I am, however, concerned that a paperless NHS by 2020 will be delivered by an inadequate information technology infrastructure and a series of "work arounds" that mean medical staff spend less time doing what they should be doing.

Let us have a paperless NHS by 2020, the "digital exemplars" described by Armstrong perhaps facilitating it.<sup>4</sup> But let each innovation be required to show more effective use of medical and nursing time in delivering safe, high quality care rather than presenting a digital barrier to be crossed at every patient encounter. If this can be done, then Moberly's digital utopia may be possible; otherwise, medical disengagement with healthcare information technology will persist.

Competing interests: None declared.

- 1 Loder E. Promises, promises. *BMJ* 2017;357:j1446. doi:10.1136/bmj.j1446 pmid:28336513.
- 2 Sinsky C, Colligan L, Li L, et al. Allocation of physician time in ambulatory practice: a time and motion study in 4 specialties. *Ann Intern Med* 2016;357:753-60. doi:10.7326/M16-0961. pmid:27595430.
- 3 Moberly T. Digital innovation and the future of doctors' work. *BMJ Careers* 27 March 2017. [http://careers.bmj.com/careers/advice/Digital\\_innovation\\_and\\_the\\_future\\_of\\_doctors%E2%80%99\\_work](http://careers.bmj.com/careers/advice/Digital_innovation_and_the_future_of_doctors%E2%80%99_work)
- 4 Armstrong S. Hospitals that are leading the way to a digital future. *BMJ* 2017;357:j1366. doi:10.1136/bmj.j1366 pmid:28330833.

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