

Digital Skills in Healthcare

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Evaluate use of Technology

Digital skills in healthcare

Introduction

Having digital skills, today, is an essential skill in every workplace. In every sector we need to be prepared and skilled to use technology. Now more than ever, with the COVID-19 pandemic the need to use technology especially for communication, is affecting every individual, either professional or non-professional.

Having professional digital skills enable everybody to communicate, work from home, having medical consultation, access to medical data, booking appointments, all without contact.

Being able to use a computer, a smartphone, or every digital device is the way of future.

A bit of history

The National Health Service was founded in 1948, to deliver free healthcare to all, has recently celebrated in 2018 its 70th anniversary

In 2010 the organization for Economic Co-operation and Development has conducted a study in six countries (not including Britain). This study has stated that new models of care are supported and improved by technology (Maguire, Evans and Honeyman, 2018).

In July 2018, the Royal College of Nursing has published a report about how the future of nurses is to become E-nurses. Thinking at the human connection, the way nurses are working and taking care of people is not so different from the past. But the tools given to them enable the nursing staff to be more efficient in terms of reporting documents electronically or communicate by mobile devices. The entire UK has planned to promote plans and funding to promote the use of technology in every branch of health and social care.

Benefit and barriers of digital technology

One of the barriers occurring in the implementation of health technology can be found in a lack of sharing information in a concentrated market, resistance in adopting digital (Bunn, Craine, 2016).

Today we all agree that the use of technology and digital skills in healthcare give us the possibility to share care records, enable NHS to access electronic patient's records, and patients can interact with NHS from remote using communication technologies not just by video consultation but also to be checked using particular kind of smartphone connected with sensors and diagnostic equipment.

In 2016, the European Health Parliament has redacted a sort of handbook to clarify which are the digital skills needed for a health care professional. I have been particularly attracted and totally agree with the introductive paragraph in which is explained that also having the better and advanced devices, if nobody is able and instructed to use it, the device is completely as a plain without a pilot.

So, the importance to have well trained professional has been a priority in connection with the implement of technology resources. To spend money and resources just on technology devices development is not enough without the preparation of the staff.

Both professionals and patients, especially in this critical time of COVID-19 pandemic, need to be trained and helped in the use of technology. A well-trained professional is the key to help and instruct patients to the use of specific devices or digital services.

The need to have formed and trained health professionals with digital skills and knowledges, has been considered in the 2012-2020 eHealth Action Plan and the CAMEI project, developing improving education, materials and programs aim to increase IT skills for all the healthcare workers.

How digital is UK?

In 2018, a basic digital skills survey from Lloyds Bank Consumer Digital index, has reported that on a sample of 9,000 people involved:

- 21% lack the full basic digital skills
- 8% has no basic digital skills at all
- 10% are without basic digital skills
- People with registered disability are 4 times as likely to be offline
- 28% of those aged 60+ are offline

The same survey conducted in 2021 from UK Consumer Digital Index, has stated that in the last six years over 16,000 people has been interviewed using a behavioural data of 1 million. And has created the largest measure in the UK about digital capability. In the last year from 2020 and 2021 the digital landscape has vertiginously changed because of the covid 19 pandemic, as never happened before. Is like in one year the digital progress has been made the progress that usually take in five years. We can find that 1.5 million more people are online but that still the 5% is not digitally skilled and excluded.

Digital Healthcare Professional

This term is used to define a healthcare professional with digital knowledges in technology use. Today more than ever, as healthcare professional, we are required to have digital skills and informatic use knowledge as part of our working routine.

Healthcare practices, policies and actions require a change with the advent of digitalisation. Professionals require to be assessed in the context of integration with patients and their safety. (Konttila, Siira and Kyngas, 2019)

Since years we are assisting at digital changes and development in this branch but in the last year and a half this change has affected everyone daily life, the development is going faster than usual. During lockdown periods the process of digitalization has accelerated. The increase of digital applications use is changing the whole healthcare sector: applications as Artificial Intelligence or telemedicine are used to define diagnosis and deliver treatments, with the use of internet, now is possible for every user to access information via health apps and the challenge is to maintain all this data and information secure and protected. (Hege, Tolks, Khun, 2020)

More than one reason to be a digital skilled worker

Most of the care provider agencies and recruiters report that is difficult to find vacancies jobs for those who has not any digital skill or knowledge.

People receiving care in their own homes is constantly increasing as are increasing assistive living technologies or telecare system: social care workers without digital skills are not able to supply the best support to those people and ensure them a proper one-person centred care.

Social care sector is going to be entirely paperless in a noticeably brief time.

The interaction between care workers during the day is part of the routine tasks, such as communications, or visualization or daily rota.

The entire NHS such as hospitals or GP practice are completely digitalized, such as care homes and nursery

According with Michael Johnson Ellis the manager director of one of the most important recruiter health agencies in UK, the HEALTHIER RECRUITMENT, we can understand how technology is playing a larger role in healthcare and how education in schools, colleges and Universities are giving to their scholars the right tools to be on track with digitalization and digital literacy; an example comes from the Royal College of Nursing's where every nurse is an e-nurse. Patients' outcome is also extremely improved with the use of technology and digital skilled healthcare workers.

In another study case rolled out in 210 care homes before the pandemic, is stated that the 35% less patients are hospitalized thanks to the use of technology.

The NHS too is supplying the adequate equipment to their workforce to be digital fully prepared. As technology improves, the role of digitally skilled staff is becoming more important than ever especially in the last year. (Johnson Ellis, 2019)

Conclusive personal reflection

On my personal experience as a healthcare worker since more than twenty years now, I can say that a huge change in required skills for this kind of job. When I started to work in different care homes in 2009, digitalization was still far away from what we were required to do as daily tasks, every report or communication was handwritten. As the technology was still not so advanced, I remember that we were not allowed to keep our mobiles with us during the working shift. Now is all changed, in some care homes where I have worked for a brief time, we were asked to write every record on a particular note pad available downloading an app provided from the care home: patients daily records, wellbeing, medication administration, and so on. And what every worker was writing was shared with the chief nurse in real time.

Another example I can provide from my experience, is having been for another brief time care worker for a domiciliary home care agency, without app provided from the agency it was impossible to work! You could not log in or log off from your shift with all the clients visited during the day, or you could not know which was your rota and eventually change on it.

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