

The NHS App: Evaluating Digital Transformation in UK Health and Social Care

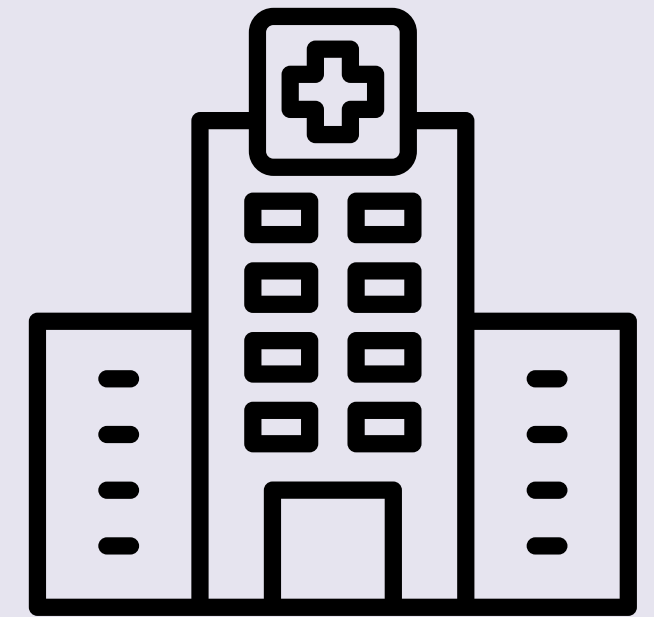


Your Name: LIZA BEDWORTH 2238817
Module Title: DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN HEALTH AND
CARE
Date
MARTIN SVEJDA

Presented by LIZA BEDWORTH



INTRODUCTION



The NHS App (launched 2019) it allows patients to book GP appointments, order prescriptions, and view health records (NHS England, 2019).

It supports the UK's wider digital strategy, including A Plan for Digital Health and Social Care and What Good Looks Like.

This presentation evaluates its impact on:

- Workforce
- Service delivery
- Patient engagement.

POLICY CONTEXT AND RATIONALE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IS POSITIONED AS ESSENTIAL FOR NHS SUSTAINABILITY (WACHTER, 2016).

- **NHS LONG TERM PLAN (2019)**
- **WACHTER REVIEW (2016)**
- **WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE (2021)**
- **DHSC DIGITAL HEALTH PLAN (2022)**

- **SYSTEM EFFICIENCY**
- **PATIENT ACCESS**
- **WORKFORCE SUSTAINABILITY**
- **LESS ADMIN BURDEN**
- **DATA-DRIVEN CARE**

CHALLENGES: AGEING POPULATION, STAFF SHORTAGES, CHRONIC DISEASE, FINANCIAL PRESSURE.

SOLUTION: DIGITAL TOOLS LIKE THE NHS APP TO IMPROVE PRODUCTIVITY (WACHTER, 2016).

**INTEGRATED CARE
PREVENTATIVE HEALTH MODELS
PATIENT EMPOWERMENT
SYSTEM RESILIENCE (PARTICULARLY POST-COVID-19)**

WORKFORCE: POSITIVE IMPACTS

THE NHS APP HAS RESHAPED ADMINISTRATIVE AND CLINICAL WORKFLOWS.

WORKFORCE IMPACT

- ✓ **REDUCED TELEPHONE DEMAND FOR GP RECEPTION STAFF**
- ✓ **AUTOMATION OF PRESCRIPTION ORDERING**
- ✓ **DIGITAL TRIAGE FUNCTIONS IMPROVING TIME ALLOCATION**

DIGITAL SYSTEMS CAN IMPROVE EFFICIENCY AND REDUCE

WORKLOAD WHEN PROPERLY INTEGRATED (KRUSE ET AL., 2018).

ADDITIONALLY, IMPROVED DATA ACCESSIBILITY ENHANCES DECISION-MAKING AND CONTINUITY OF CARE.

FROM A SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE, THIS SUPPORTS THE NHS LONG TERM PLAN'S AIM TO "DIGITALLY ENABLE THE FRONTLINE WORKFORCE" (NHS ENGLAND, 2019)



Workforce: Critical Challenges

Despite efficiencies, workforce adaptation has been complex

KEY CHALLENGES:

DIGITAL SKILLS GAPS

- RESISTANCE TO CHANGE
- INCREASED DIGITAL MESSAGING WORKLOAD
- CYBERSECURITY CONCERNS

WACHTER (2016) ARGUES DIGITAL MATURITY REQUIRES SUSTAINED TRAINING AND CULTURAL CHANGE — NOT JUST TECHNOLOGY DEPLOYMENT.

FURTHERMORE, GREENHALGH ET AL. (2017) HIGHLIGHT THAT DIGITAL INNOVATIONS OFTEN FAIL WHEN ORGANISATIONAL READINESS IS UNDERESTIMATED.

SOME CLINICIANS REPORT INCREASED “HIDDEN WORKLOAD” FROM MANAGING ONLINE CONSULTATIONS AND MESSAGES. THIS DEMONSTRATES THAT DIGITAL EFFICIENCY GAINS MAY REDISTRIBUTE RATHER THAN REDUCE LABOUR.

SERVICE DELIVERY: IMPROVEMENTS

**THE NHS APP HAS ALTERED SERVICE
DELIVERY THROUGH**

- ✓ 24/7 APPOINTMENT BOOKING
- ✓ ONLINE REPEAT PRESCRIPTIONS
- ✓ ACCESS TO TEST RESULTS
- ✓ COVID-19 VACCINATION CERTIFICATION

THIS ALIGNS WITH RESEARCH SHOWING DIGITAL HEALTH PLATFORMS IMPROVE ACCESS AND CONVENIENCE (KRUSE ET AL., 2018).

DURING COVID-19, DIGITAL ACCESS ENSURED CONTINUITY OF CARE WHILE REDUCING INFECTION RISK (DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE, 2022).

THE APP CONTRIBUTED TO IMPROVED SYSTEM RESILIENCE UNDER PRESSURE.





SERVICE DELIVERY: LIMITATIONS

**DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION PRESENTS INTEGRATION AND EQUITY
CHALLENGES**

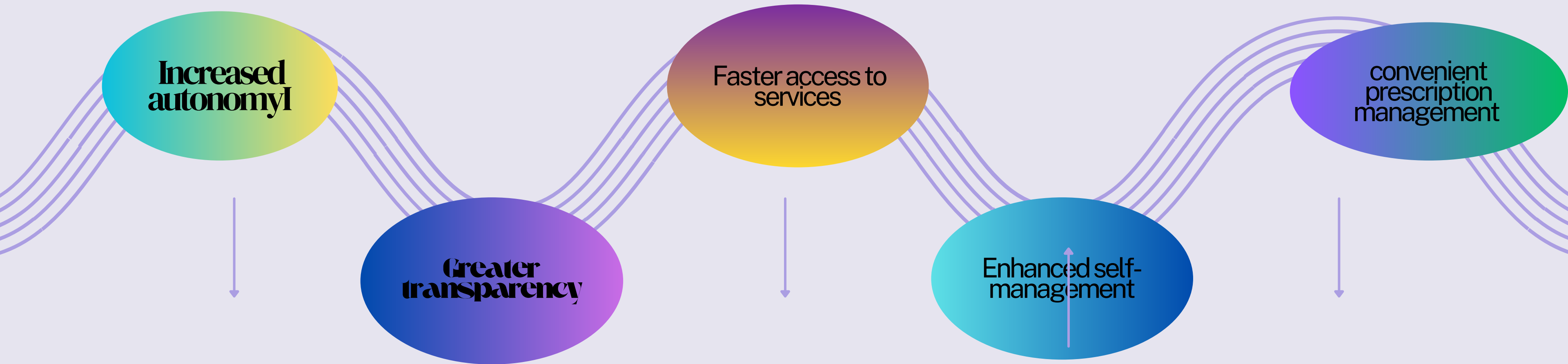
- DIFFERENT GP SYSTEMS
- IT INFRASTRUCTURE GAPS
 - HIGH SETUP COSTS
- LIMITED INTEROPERABILITY

FRAGMENTED IT SYSTEMS CAN WEAKEN DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION (WACHTER, 2016).

FRAMEWORKS LIKE NORMALISATION PROCESS THEORY SUGGEST DIGITAL TOOLS SUCCEED ONLY WHEN EMBEDDED IN ROUTINE PRACTICE (MURRAY ET AL., 2011), SO ADOPTION ACROSS THE NHS REMAINS UNEVEN.

PATIENT / SERVICE USER IMPACT

For patients, the NHS App offers



ACCESS TO PERSONAL HEALTH RECORDS CAN EMPOWER PATIENTS AND IMPROVE ENGAGEMENT (KRUSE ET AL., 2018).

**THIS ALIGNS WITH PERSON-CENTRED CARE PRINCIPLES AND SHARED DECISION-MAKING MODELS.
DIGITAL TOOLS MAY ALSO IMPROVE MEDICATION ADHERENCE AND APPOINTMENT ATTENDANCE.**

DIGITAL INEQUALITY AND ETHICAL CONCERNS

DESPITE BENEFITS, DIGITAL EXCLUSION REMAINS A MAJOR CONCERN

SHAW ET AL. (2018) NOTE DIGITAL HEALTH MAY WIDEN INEQUALITIES DUE TO:

- AGE-RELATED DIGITAL LITERACY GAPS
- SOCIOECONOMIC DIFFERENCES
 - DISABILITY BARRIERS
 - RURAL CONNECTIVITY

OFFICE FOR NATIONAL STATISTICS DATA SHOWS OLDER ADULTS USE DIGITAL HEALTH SERVICES LESS OFTEN.

THIS RAISES CONCERNS ABOUT EQUALITY UNDER THE NHS CONSTITUTION.

PRIVACY UNDER GENERAL DATA PROTECTION REGULATION ALSO AFFECTS PUBLIC TRUST.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION MUST REMAIN FAIR AND SECURE.

CONCLUSION

The NHS App has reshaped:

- Workforce roles
- Service delivery
- Patient engagement

It supports national digital modernisation.

However:

- More workforce training is needed
- Infrastructure gaps remain
- Digital exclusion must be addressed

Digital innovation is vital, but must remain ethical and inclusive.



RECOMMENDATIONS

WORKFORCE TRAINING – MANDATORY DIGITAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

DIGITAL INCLUSION – IMPROVE DEVICE ACCESS AND SUPPORT

INTEROPERABILITY – STANDARDISE IT SYSTEMS ACROSS TRUSTS

EVALUATION – MONITOR SUSTAINABILITY USING NORMALISATION PROCESS THEORY (MURRAY ET AL., 2011)

Thank
you very
much!

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