Acceleration Of Progress Is Needed | Paperless NHS By 2018

Tuesday 18 March, 2014

techUK, has today published a report looking at the progress made a year on from Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt's challenge for the NHS to "go 'paperless' by 2018".

The techUK report: 'Digitising the NHS by 2018 - One Year On', states that the ambitions outlined by the Health Secretary remain achievable, but that success will require acceleration in implementation in 2014 and beyond.

There has been progress in developing the infrastructure that underpins a paperless NHS. It has been a period where Government has laid the foundations for the delivery of the digital health agenda, rather than materially moved it forward in terms of 'frontline' health and social care services.

The report highlights six key recommendations that must be addressed in order to ensure the digital health agenda becomes a reality:

Improve the way health and social care professionals and patients are engaged on the design of digital products and services

Maintain investment of public and private funding towards the goal of a paperless NHS, supplemented by advice on how to deliver the digital health agenda and why it's important

Invest more time and resource into raising awareness of the benefits that technology projects deliver

Prioritise improving integrated digitisation where information crosses the 'boundaries' between care organisations, particularly the boundaries between the NHS and non-NHS partners

Move towards a more mixed digital system economy. The supplier community needs to demonstrate more willingness to interoperate and share data between systems, in order to deliver the IT solutions required to have a paperless NHS. The NHS also needs to support interoperability between suppliers, of all sizes

Learn from other industries that have embraced the digital agenda. We have seen from the retail and logistics industries that it is only when the whole business process has been optimised were significant benefits and savings having been achieved.
Progress is well underway towards achieving the targets set by the Health Secretary. The first year has seen significant activity in terms of planning; allocating funding, assessing capabilities of IT solutions, and raising awareness and educating audiences on the digital health agenda.

techUK's report calls for a step-up in activity in 2014/2015, outlining the need for a concerted effort to engage healthcare professionals, patients and the public on the value of digital solutions and services in the NHS, whilst also overcoming the concerns around the digital agenda, such as information governance and data privacy. These stakeholders would also need to play a fundamental role in the on-going design of IT solutions and services, in order to deliver a truly holistic digital NHS.

Natalie Bateman, Head of Health and Social Care, techUK said: "Good progress has been made in regards to planning and allocating the necessary funding for a digital health service; however more is needed in the coming year. Whilst it is clear that some NHS providers are well underway in terms of implementing the paperless agenda, the majority are only just starting out on their digital health journey.

"Everyone involved in delivering the agenda needs to work together to ensure there is a step-up in activity that will create a safer and more efficient health and social care service. This needs to be based on digital platforms that will transform the health and social care system, rather than simply automating tasks."

The report's key recommendations are:

Improve the way health and social care professionals and patients are engaged on the design of digital products and services. Creating a truly digital system requires careful development and management, involving the public, patients, professionals and digital engineers working together to create services that

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deliver truly holistic care. If it is rushed, there is a danger of it leading to short cuts and tick box decision making, without considering the impact on care as a whole

Maintain investment of public and private funding towards the goal of a paperless NHS, supplemented by advice on how to deliver the digital health agenda and why it's important. The general risk aversion to technological change amongst some service providers has led to them having a 'wait and see' approach to bidding for funding. Similarly, cultural barriers have meant some have chosen not to invest in a technology solution if it doesn't directly benefit them, not recognising the wider benefits to the health and care community they operate in. Pragmatic commissioning incentives and support will go some way in addressing these challenges.

Invest more time and resource into raising awareness of the benefits that technology projects deliver. It is vital that all those involved in delivering the digital agenda demonstrate real and tangible benefits and improved care, not just for specific organisations, but to the health and social care system as a whole. Funding and support for investment needs to recognise that benefits often accrue across the whole health and care economy.

Prioritise improving integrated digitisation where information crosses the 'boundaries' between care organisations, particularly the boundaries between the NHS and non-NHS partners. This is where digitisation tends to be weakest. Patients will increasingly expect their health and social care records to be joined-up, but an on-going programme of awareness and education will be required to encourage public involvement and support. The aspiration should be for secure, consented data sharing to become the norm, rather than the exception, between all services involved in individuals' care, NHS or otherwise.

Move towards a more mixed digital system economy. The supplier community needs to demonstrate more willingness to interoperate and share data between systems, in order to deliver the IT solutions required to have a paperless NHS. Open platforms and interoperability need to become the norm; 'closed' solutions will not be viable to meet this Government's ambition. Simultaneously the NHS needs to support the interoperability between suppliers, and continue to encourage innovation and procure solutions from suppliers of all sizes.

Learn from other industries that have embraced the digital agenda. We have seen from the retail and logistics industries that it is only when the whole business process has been optimised were significant benefits and savings having been achieved. Health and social care is at a similar point in the evolution of its business transformation. The risk, if not done correctly, is that the paperless ambition simply automates task, interferes with the direct delivery of patient care and ultimately turns doctors into data entry clerks.
- Ends -

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