

Building the right foundations to deliver a ‘digital revolution’ in health and care

The Department of Health and Social Care has published ‘a plan for digital health and social care’ that focuses on the fundamentals of electronic patient records, shared care records, and digital social care. Gary Birks, general manager, UK and Ireland, Orion Health, reviews the plan to see if it is taking digital health transformation in the right direction.

“The latest strategy for health and care IT looks to build on what has been achieved over the past two decades, while making sure that all trusts, integrated care systems, and social care departments are levelling-up and have the right foundations to deliver a ‘digital revolution’.

“It’s good to see the NHS’ central bodies taking such a pragmatic approach, because it suggests they are determined to deliver a step change in digital capability, this time. It’s also good to see them assert so clearly that this is important because health and social care cannot afford to go on as they are.

“As we all know, healthcare has emerged from the Covid-19 pandemic with a massive backlog of elective care, and is struggling with emergency and primary care demand, amid capacity constraints. Better digital health provision, to join-up services, create more efficient and effective care pathways, and improve access is the only way forward.

“Orion Health is a leading provider of shared care records to the UK and Ireland, so it’s great to see ‘a plan for digital health and care’ reiterate existing targets for ICSs to move from having a ‘basic’ ShCR in place to creating a ‘comprehensive’ ShCR by 2024.

“It also says that digital social care systems should be linked into ShCRs as they come on stream. Alongside this, I hope the plan will accelerate the expansion of ShCRs to care homes.

“We have seen first-hand, through the experience of customers such as Connecting Care in Bristol, and the Care and Health Information Exchange in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, that having a full view of their residents’ records empowers care home staff to deliver the best possible care and can prevent unnecessary hospital admissions.

“Shared care records are key to the ambitions set out in the plan for population health management, in terms of delivering the infrastructure for patient data and information sharing, a platform for generating population level intelligence and the tools to enable effective interventions. We are already working with our ShCR customers on their digital maturity models and helping those such as the Dorset Care Record to expand their care co-ordination and patient engagement tools. And we’re developing the analytics capabilities that they will need.

“Against that background, it’s encouraging to see areas such as virtual wards and remote patient monitoring receiving so much emphasis in the plan. It shows that we’re all pulling together, that we’re going in the right direction, and we’re all committed to delivering a digital transformation that will work for patients as well as for the service.”